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RED RYVINGTON.

BY

WILLIAM WESTALL,

AUTHOR OF "LARRY LOHENGRIN," "THE OLD FACTORY," ETC. ETC.



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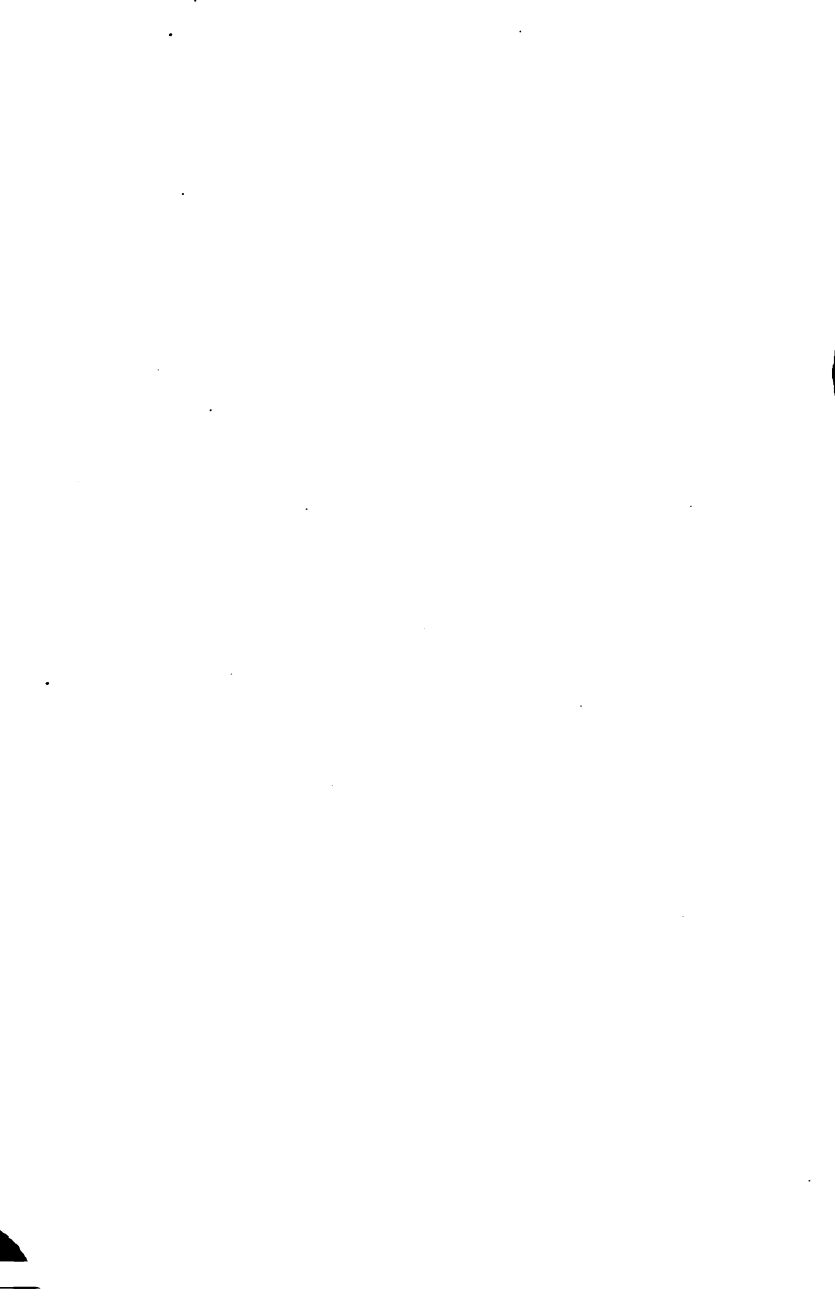
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RED RYVINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE BELLS.

A SUMMER morning in the valley of the Upper Rhone.

A wayfarer in orthodox pedestrian costume—knickerbockers, Norfolk jacket, helmet-shaped hat, and mountain boots—is walking leisurely down the Furca road. In one hand he carries a stout alpenstock, strong enough to sustain a man's weight over a crevasse; from his belt is suspended a geological hammer. A strap slung across his right shoulder holds a light waterproof coat; a second, slung across the other shoulder, supports a light hand-bag. Other incumbrances the traveller has none. He has discovered that Switzerland possesses the cheapest and best organised parcel post in Europe. Before setting out on a journey he puts a postage stamp on his baggage and consigns it to the nearest post office, addressed to his next destination, where he never fails to find it on his arrival thither.

Our wayfarer is young; he does not look more than five or six and twenty, and his countenance, equally with his dress, attest his English nationality. The bronze tint of it, and the peeled appearance of his cheeks, show that he has lately spent much time in the open air, and probably made more than one excursion among the glaciers of the high Alps. As touching stature he is rather under than over middle height, wide-shouldered and deep-chested; and the breadth of his hand, as it grasps his alpenstock, shows that it has been accustomed to wield heavier tools than painter's brush or writer's pen. His face is oval and perhaps too long to suit a fastidious taste, albeit the defect is rendered less apparent by a long tawny beard, which, moreover, so completely covers his mouth and chin that it is difficult to determine whether these important features denote firmness of character or weakness of purpose. To complete our description, it remains only to add that the traveller has a broad, intelligent forehead, a somewhat large, though straight, nose, well-marked eyebrows, and large, deep blue eyes, the whites of them remarkably clear and bright, a sign of health and high

spirits often observable in persons of temperate habits who have passed some time in the open air at great altitudes.

From time to time the pedestrian pauses to break a geological specimen from an erratic block, to gather from the wayside an alpine flower, or to gaze on the prospect around him; as well he may, for the scene is one of stupendous grandeur. He is between two mountains, the Galenstock and the Grimsel. Behind him rises the great mass of the cloud-pinnacled Furca. Peaks still loftier—the Alps of the Valais and the Oberland, the Shreckhorn, the Finsteraarhorn, and the Mischabel—crowned with their eternal diadems of snow, are in view. The road he is traversing, cut in the flank of the Galenstock, skirts the great Rhone glacier, which gleams in the unclouded sunshine like a frozen Niagara, as if some mighty cascade, leaping down the gorge, had been stopped in full career and turned into ice by the stroke of an enchanter's wand.

As the traveller advances, the character of the scenery changes. Hardly a sign of vegetation is visible. He is enclosed between great ramparts of rock. The ground is strewn with huge blocks of weird shape, like the ruins of a shattered planet, while great ribs of granite, which might be the bones of a buried world, thrust themselves from the ground. A tremendous rift intersects the valley, down which the new-born Rhone, as if mad with joy at being freed from its icy prison, forces its way; but so deep is the abyss that in the upper air the wild uproar of its foam-churned waters sounds like the murmur of a summer stream.

The road is a marvel, winding now between frowning crags, now, where the valley widens out, through green meadows, brilliant with cowslips, primroses, and the blue gentian, skirting ever and anon the gloomy gorge through which rushes the turbid torrent, swollen by the melting of alpine snows. Seen from afar, the road is

“ Like a silver zone,

Flung about carelessly, it shines afar,
Catching the eye in many a broken link,
In many a turn and traverse as it glides;
And oft above and oft below appears,
Seen o'er the wall by one who journeys up
As though it were another, through the wild,
Leading along, he knows not whence or whither.
Yet through its fairy course, go where it will,
The torrent stops it not, the rugged rock
Opens and lets it in, and on it runs,
Winning its easy way from clime to clime,
Through glens locked up before.”

In plain prose, the Furca road, like other alpine roads, is a zig-zag, and however picturesque zig-zags of this sort, when

seen from a distance, may be, they are terribly roundabout; and pedestrians who want to save their legs, and dislike heat and dust, do not disdain to take short cuts through the woods or meadows that border the way, varied by an occasional scramble over a promontory of rock. This expedient Randle Ryvington often adopted, all the more willingly as the trees with their heavy foliage offered an agreeable shade, and the footpaths were free from the dust that rendered the high road well-nigh unbearable. After making one of these short cuts, whereby he saved several miles of road walking, he threw himself down on a mossy bank at the foot of a tall pine-tree, near which flowed a tiny stream of crystal water. Then, drawing from his pocket a case of sandwiches, he proceeded to eat with good appetite, as indeed he might, for it was well-nigh noon, and he had been afoot since early morning, washing down his repast with an occasional draught from the rill. He next lit a pipe, and, after solacing himself with a smoke, lay down at full length, his head pillowed on a piece of velvety turf, and looked up at the patches of blue sky that showed through the verdant fretwork of the tree tops. The attitude, the hour, the place seemed favourable to meditation, and Randle set himself to meditate accordingly; but the circumstances were still more favourable for repose, and after several vain efforts to collect his ideas, and resume the thread of thought which he had begun with his pipe, he fell into a deep sleep, well earned by the fatigues of the day.

He had slept, he knew not how long, when he awoke with a start and the sound of bells in his ears, his first thought being that he was in his own bed at home, and that the Whitebrook factories were ringing in the hands to their work. A single glance at the blue sky overhead showed him his mistake, and the continued tinkling of bells and the crackings of whips in the distance roused him to full consciousness. Rising to his feet, and looking upward through the trees, he perceived that his "knocker-up" was one of those huge vehicles known in German Switzerland as a post wagon, and in the Swiss Romande as a diligence—a sort of Noah's ark on wheels, carrying a ton of luggage and a score of passengers, and strong enough and heavy enough to have outlasted the life of an antediluvian patriarch. The ponderous concern was dragged by six horses, three abreast, to each of whose collars were attached two or three bells, the ringing of which had wakened Randle from his sleep.

The diligence, driven at a tremendous speed in a cloud of dust, descended the hill. After waiting until the dust had somewhat subsided, our traveller went down into the road; for the footpath, which for some time had been little more than a faint track, now ceased altogether, and the hillside was fast

becoming too steep and rocky to afford even foothold for goats or vantage ground for fir-trees.

Randle Ryvington resumed his walk, little thinking that the tinkling of those diligence bells, which he could still hear faintly in the distance, marked a turning point in his destiny, or that they had summoned him to save a human life. He was thinking rather of Whitebrook and its factory bells; that his holiday was nearly over; that he must soon make for home, and wondering what news the letters he expected to find at Ouchy would bring him.

He had walked briskly for the greater part of an hour, neither the geological features of the country nor its botanical productions seeming to attract much of his attention, and reached the bottom of a steep incline where the way diverged abruptly to his right, when he heard again the sound of bells, this time behind him. Looking round, he perceived an open travelling carriage descending the incline at a fast trot. To keep as much out of the dust as possible, Randle drew aside into the angle formed by the turn in the road, and there waited for the vehicle to pass by. The point at which he stood overhung the Rhone, whose white swirling waters, as they dashed themselves against the rocky sides of the gorge, he had only to turn his head to see.

He watched the carriage curiously; for both pace and place were eminently suggestive of the possibility of accident,—what sort of accident Randle shuddered to think. But when he saw that one of the wheels was firmly locked with a shoe and a chain, another held in check by a strong brake, and that, as the carriage neared the bend, the driver pulled his horses into a jog-trot, he felt reassured.

"These fellows know their business," he muttered; "why should I feel concerned? Besides, the penalty of a mistake would be so terrible that they dare not be reckless."

The carriage, he noticed, contained two ladies and a gentleman, besides a fourth passenger on the box. They also noticed him.

"That young fellow looks very like an Englishman," observed the gentleman, "pedestrianising, I suppose."

"I have no doubt he is," said one of the ladies. "See how stolidly he stands there, bolt upright, his alpenstock firmly planted and his countenance unmoved."

"Yes, he looks more like a sentinel on duty than a youth on pleasure bent. But young men now-a-days do take their pleasure sadly; not as they used to do when I was young."

Meanwhile the object of these remarks was just about to leave his post and continue his walk, when he heard another

jingling of bells, and saw, rather to his annoyance, a second carriage coming full trot down the incline; and no sooner had it shot round the corner, and disappeared in a cloud of dust, than a third hove in sight.

Not wanting to be choked, he decided to wait until this, too, had gone by.

He was watching its progress with some impatience, when, as the carriage reached the middle of the brow, he was surprised to perceive that its speed, instead of slackening, suddenly increased. Then he heard a snap; the horses broke into a canter, which almost instantly became a gallop; and the driver, after a vain attempt to pull them up, threw down the reins and leaped into the road, leaving his passengers—who, as Randle Ryvington now saw, were two ladies—to their fate. His first impulse was to seize the horses' heads and try to stop them by main force before they reached the precipice; for turning the corner at the pace they were going was out of the question, even if there had been anyone to guide them. But this expedient was conceived only to be abandoned. To attempt it would be to sacrifice his life to no purpose, for a single glance sufficed to show him that the horses, even with the best will in the world, could not stop. If he tried to withstand them, he must of necessity be thrown down and trampled to death, or hurled over the precipice. As it seemed, nothing short of a miracle could save them and the inmates of the carriage from destruction.

So Randle, despite his burning desire to do something, had to stand helplessly by, and with white face and sternly compressed lips await the issue.

Another minute, and—

The horses are now almost abreast of him; they are making straight for the abyss. One of the ladies, half rising from her seat, her lips blanched and terror-parted, utters a piercing scream and looks at Randle with appealing eyes.

"Now or never!" he says to himself, and as the carriage flashes past he leans forward, seizes the lady in his arms, and, exerting all his strength, lifts her clean over the wheels, and lands her safely beside him.

The next moment the carriage is on the narrow ledge below the road. For a second it seems to dwell there, and then, with a wild cry of fear, the horses with their living freight plunge into the boiling Rhone.

Then Randle Ryvington turned and looked at his companion whom he still held in his arms. She was deadly pale and half fainting, but, as her rescuer thought, very beautiful. Her hat had come off, and her long golden hair, loosened by the descent

from the carriage, fell over her shoulders like a veil. She seemed young—not more than eighteen, Randle thought, and tall for her age.

He asked her if she felt better, if she was hurt at all. She answered him with a half-dazed, inquiring look, as if she had heard his question without understanding it.

“Is it a dream or is it real?” she murmured, pointing to the precipice. “Has the carriage gone down there? Where is Miss Joyce?”

“The carriage has gone down there,” said Randle, solemnly, “and Miss Joyce, if she be the lady who was with you, has gone too. You will never see her alive again.”

“And I am saved—you have saved me from a terrible death. Oh, sir, I know not who you are, but I owe you my life.”

“You owe it not to me, but to God. I was called to save you. If it had not been for the ringing of the bells—— But we are forgetting the driver. See, he is up yonder, writhing in the dust. He did not act a very noble part, it is true, but we must try to help him for all that.”

“Do you think it was his fault that the horses ran away?”

“I am not sure that the horses did run away, but in any case he ought not to have left his post without making more of an effort to stop his horses. I think the shoe must have slipped off the wheel, or the chain snapped—perhaps it was never properly secured—and, the man not having his horses well in hand, they were pushed into a gallop. When he left his seat all chance of stopping them was, of course, gone. A little pluck and presence of mind, and all might have been well; but the fellow thought of nothing but saving his own wretched life.”

“You must not be too severe on him. You know ‘all that a man hath will he give for his life.’”

“And quite right, too—all that he hath. But you see this man risked two lives and lost one that he might keep his own.”

By this time they had reached the spot where the driver lay, apparently unable to rise. Randle submitted him to a rapid examination, and asked him a few questions, in which he was assisted by the young girl, whose knowledge of German was much superior to his own. The man was less hurt than they had expected. The blood on his face came from a superficial wound on the head, which was easily staunched by a pocket handkerchief. His other injuries consisted of a few contusions and a severely sprained ankle. Randle, after giving him a drink from his pocket-flask, helped him to the roadside, and made him as comfortable as was possible in the circumstances. His account of the accident was that the horses, startled by the snapping of the chain, and feeling the carriage almost on their haunches,

rushed madly down the hill. When he found it impossible to stop them he jumped into the road. He did not appear conscious of having in any way failed in his duty, and Randle could not command enough German to tell him what he thought of his conduct. He did not object to be left. A vehicle of some sort was sure to pass before long, he said, that would give him a lift as far as Viesch.

CHAPTER II.

TALK BY THE WAY.

THE next question with Randle was, what to do with the fair girl whom he had rescued, and who was evidently so overcome with agitation and distress as to be in no condition to judge for herself. He could not ask her what she proposed to do, so he inquired what he could do for her, and whither she would like to go. If she would remain there, he said, with the post-boy, he would hurry on to the nearest village and fetch a carriage, so that she might continue her journey.

"Oh, no," she replied, "I would not like to remain here. If you will let me" (timidly) "I would rather walk on with you. When the others find that our carriage does not come they will wait, and we can overtake them."

"The others? You belong to the party in the two carriages that have just passed, then?"

"Yes; my father and mother and the courier are in the first, my sisters and the maids in the second. We are on our way from Chur to Zermatt. Miss Joyce—the lady—the lady who was with me, was our governess. She has been with us ever since I was a little girl. She was so good and kind, and we all loved her—oh! we loved her."

Here the poor girl's lip quivered, and a sob choked her utterance.

"Are you quite sure, sir," she exclaimed, when she was again able to speak, "I mean, do you think she is surely killed—that there is no possibility she may have escaped?"

"I fear, none. No creature could fall down that precipice and live. It is a sheer descent of nearly a thousand feet. But before we go I will look; though the gorge hereabouts is so deep, and the river so rough, that I do not expect to see any trace either of the carriage or horses."

As Randle spoke he let himself down from the road to the narrow ledge bordering the precipice five or six feet below, and lying full length on the ground, gazed long and intently down

the face of the rock and into the seething water. Then he rose and rejoined his companion, who had been anxiously watching him.

"I can see nothing whatever of the carriage and horses," he said; "but on a piece of jutting rock, out of which grows a bush, about a hundred yards down, I thought I saw the fluttering of a robe. It may be part of the poor lady's dress, or even her body."

"Alive?"

Randle shook his head.

"The concussion alone, the slightest touch against the side of the gorge, after so tremendous a fall, would be enough to cause instant death, even if the flight through the air had not caused it already. But it would be well for somebody to go down and see. And if it is the poor lady's body it must be brought up and receive Christian burial. And now, if you feel sufficiently recovered, we had perhaps better go on. The other carriages will be a long way ahead of us by this time."

The young lady, who, as Randle perceived, could not trust herself to speak, bowed, in token of acquiescence, and they set out on their walk. He began by adapting his pace to hers, but he soon found that she was almost as good a pedestrian as himself; and having the advantage of falling ground they made rapid progress, doing four miles in little more than an hour.

"Oh, how thoughtless and selfish I am," exclaimed the girl suddenly, breaking silence for the first time since they had left the scene of the disaster. "I hope I am not taking you out of your way. Am I, or were you going in this direction?"

"Yes; I was on my way to Viesch and Brigue."

"I am so glad. It would be really too bad, after all you have done, to make further demands on your kindness. But I should like you to see my father and mother, that they may thank you for having saved their daughter's life at the peril of your own."

"No, no; you mistake; I risked nothing. There is no danger in lifting a young lady from a carriage."

"Not when the horses are going full gallop and the carriage is on the edge of a precipice! It was a feat that required great courage and presence of mind, and you might easily have been crushed under the wheels, or thrown into the gorge. Suppose your foot had slipped at the moment you leaned forward to lift me out! I shall always consider that you saved my life at the risk of your own. You have placed me and my family under an obligation that we can never repay; and I am sure my father and mother will say the same."

"Less than you think for. As I said a little while ago—but

you were probably too much agitated to hear me—I was called to save you."

"Called to save me?" said the girl, wonderingly. "How?"

"By the ringing of the bells. I was fast asleep up there in the wood, and if it had not been for the ringing of those bells I might have been there yet; and if the diligence had passed by five minutes sooner or later, I should certainly not have been at the turn of the road when your carriage went into the Rhone——"

"And I should have gone with it," interposed the young lady, the returning colour again deserting her cheeks.

"I am afraid so," returned Randle, whom the incident seemed to have deeply impressed. "But you see it was not to be; it had been ordered otherwise."

"Poor Miss Joyce!"

"Yes; one is taken and another left. Life is full of mysteries. It is only a question of a few years with the youngest and the strongest of us. There is an appointed time for all men, and when our time comes we must shuffle off this mortal coil as those have done who have gone before us."

"Do you belong to our Church?" said the other, somewhat timidly, for she had not been used to this sort of talk, and scarcely knew what to say.

"I think so. At least, if you mean the Church of England, I do—in a fashion."

"Are you High or Low?"

"That is a difficult question to answer. If I wanted to be very precise I should say a little of both and not very much of either," said Randle, inwardly amused at the turn the conversation was taking.

"Perhaps you are Broad?"

"In some things I am—very. In others people say I am very narrow. But is not that a carriage crawling up the next zig-zag? It seems empty, too."

"Yes; I do not see anybody but the driver."

"If it is empty, do you not think it would be well to get the driver to turn round and take you to Viesch? Your parents will be there by this time, and may be anxious about you."

"You will go with me?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"Oh yes, I do wish it. Papa and mamma would be very sorry if they were not to see you and thank you."

"I shall be very glad to make their acquaintance, I am sure; but if it were possible I should be glad to be spared the thanks."

"I mean," added Randle, fearing that the remark might

appear somewhat rude, whereas, in fact, it was attributable in about equal measure to bashfulness and modesty—"I mean that you have already thanked me quite as much as I deserve, and you know in what a strange manner I happened to be near when the accident befell."

"Yes, I know. It was God's doing, and it is our duty to thank Him. But it was your doing also, and we should fail in our duty if we were not to thank you, and I am sure my father and mother will say the same. I shall never forget it as long as I live—never."

"Here comes the carriage," said Randle, glad of an opportunity to turn the conversation. "The man seems to have no passengers. I do not suppose he is likely to make any difficulty about taking us to Viesch."

Nor did he—at least none that did not yield to an offer of full fare and double *Trinkgeld*—and in half an hour they were at Viesch.

As the carriage drove up to the hall door, a stout, middle-aged gentleman, of commonplace though pleasant countenance, destitute of beard or whisker, came forward, looking very much surprised.

"How is this, Muriel? What have you being doing so long? Where is Miss Joyce? And—and—who is this gentleman?"

"I do not know who he is, papa, but he has saved my life, and Miss Joyce is—is——"

And here Muriel burst into tears.

"What has happened? Has there been an accident? Why, this is not the same carriage. There has been an accident."

"There has, indeed. The driver lost command of his horses, and the poor lady who was with your daughter was carried down into the Rhone."

"And Muriel?"

"This gentleman saved me, papa—dragged me out of the carriage only one second before the horses rushed over the precipice, at the peril of his life."

"Thank God! thank God! and" (turning to Randle) "may God bless you, sir, for your courage and devotion. You have made us your debtors for life. Might I ask to whom we are beholden for this great service?"

"My name is Randle Ryvington. But you make too much of what I did, sir; you do, indeed; and when you know all the circumstances——"

"It is sufficient for me to know that by an act of courage and devotion you saved my child from a frightful danger. No explanation can minimise it, my dear sir, or lessen the obligation

under which you have placed me and my family. But it is time, I think, that you knew something more of us. I am Lord Lindisfarne; the young lady whose life you have saved is Lady Muriel Avalon; and if you will kindly accompany me into the hotel I will introduce you to the countess and my other daughters, who will, I am sure, add their thanks to mine."

So Randle, not being able to resist a request so kindly put, followed his new acquaintance, and had the honour of being introduced to Lady Lindisfarne and her eldest and younger daughters, the Ladies Maude and Mary, one of whom was a few years the senior, the other a few years the junior, of Lady Muriel, and, notwithstanding the young man's shyness—of which, however, there was little outward manifestation—he did not find their gratitude embarrassing. For though the expression of it was warm and, to all appearance, sincere, not a word was said which gave him any sense of discomfort, or of being overpraised. They all seemed much shocked and distressed at the terrible death of Miss Joyce, yet it seemed to Randle that their grief was less acute than Muriel's had been.

CHAPTER III.

RAISING THE DEAD.

"Do you think, Mr. Ryvington," said Lord Lindisfarne, after the story of the accident had been told and retold, and its causes and consequences curiously discussed, "that poor Miss Joyce's body was caught on that bush and still remains there?"

"I think it is very likely—so likely that it would be well to place the matter beyond doubt by sending somebody down to see."

"If it be there we must, of course, have it brought up and buried. But will not that be very difficult? How far down did you say it was?"

"Three or four hundred feet, I should think. I do not think there will be any great difficulty either in ascertaining if the body be there, or of bringing it up if it is—with proper appliances, of course. I have given my mind to a little practical engineering occasionally, and if I can be of any use I am sure I shall be very glad."

"Thank you very much, your help will be most welcome," said Lord Lindisfarne. "You are really too kind: not content with conferring upon us one inestimable obligation, you seek to

confer upon us another. But can you remain here all night without inconvenience to yourself?"

"Certainly. In no case should I have gone farther than Brigue, and I am not sure that I should not have stayed here."

"It was our intention to go on to Brigue this afternoon; but we cannot, of course, continue our journey without making an attempt to recover poor Miss Joyce's body, and give it decent burial. You spoke of appliances just now. We shall want a long rope, I suppose, and some sort of hoisting tackle?"

"If any is to be had here, which, from the look of the place, I greatly doubt. But I will just look round the village and see what they have got. There is sure to be a forge, and somebody who can do a bit of iron and wood work; and if there is not, I daresay I can contrive what is necessary myself."

"If you will permit me I will go with you. I can perhaps be of some use, for I was once a sailor."

"A sailor, Lord Lindisfarne?"

"Yes; I was a few years in the navy in my young days; but it is so long ago that I am afraid I have lost all my cunning in the matter of ropes, though I think if I tried I could still reef a topsail and tie a bowline knot."

"By all means come. Your advice and help will be most useful, and my knowledge of German is so very limited that I fear that alone I should not be able to make these fellows understand what I want."

"In that case I am probably worse equipped than yourself, for I hardly know German at all. But that is easily arranged; we must have the courier with us; he will interpret for you."

After taking counsel with the innkeeper they visited the blacksmith and the joiner, the latter of whom also acted as master-builder; but, as Randle expected, the best hoisting machinery available was of the most primitive description, and not at all suited for the purpose required. He was obliged, therefore, to make shift with such rough tackle as he could devise, and the village workmen put together on the spur of the moment. A cathead was contrived by fixing a strong though extremely clumsy block to the end of a stout post, which Randle proposed to make fast at the edge of the precipice with iron clamps, forged after his instructions by the blacksmith. Ropes there were and to spare, but a good deal of splicing had to be done before the length Randle deemed necessary was prepared. To the end of it was attached a wooden seat like that of a swing, and a short rope with hook and eye to loop round the body, if it should be found.

When all was ready, an expedition consisting of three vehicles and seven or eight men, besides Lord Lindisfarne, Randle

Ryvington, the courier, and a young Englishman of the name of Voules, who volunteered to accompany them and lend a hand, set out for the scene of the accident. The days were fortunately then at their longest, and, though the hour was somewhat late, nobody doubted that the object they had in view could easily be accomplished before nightfall. And so, if all had gone well, it might have been. They only forget, as people generally do, to allow for the unforeseen.

"Which of these fellows do you propose to lower into the gulf?" asked Lord Lindisfarne of Randle, as their carriage toiled slowly up the steep ascent near

"Where the swift Rhone cleaves his way between
Heights which appear as lovers who have parted
In haste, whose mining depths so intervene,
That they can meet no more, though broken-hearted."

"To swing down there at the end of a rope five hundred feet long were a fitting feat for a maintopman."

"Or a North Country steeple-Jack," said Randle, with a smile. "I do not propose to ask any of them to go down; I mean to undertake that job myself."

"You, Mr. Ryvington! Oh, no, that would be too bad. You have done enough for us already, my dear sir; more than we can ever repay. Let one of those men go down. I have no doubt they will be quite willing enough for a sufficient consideration. For a couple of napoleons I daresay everyone of them would volunteer."

"I should think that is very likely. At the same time, you must remember that we do not know these men, nor what they can do, nor what sort of nerves they possess. They probably do not know themselves. Now it would be a very sad thing if one of them—perhaps a man with a family—when he had been lowered away and beyond the reach of help, should grow faint or giddy, lose his hold, and fall into the river. If one has nerve the thing is easy enough, hardly more dangerous than sitting in an arm-chair at home. I have no doubt about my nerves. I have proved them lately in several alpine excursions, much more perilous than being swung over the Rhone at the end of a long rope, and quite as trying to the nerves. I think you had better let me have my way, Lord Lindisfarne."

"I cannot deny that there is much force in what you say, and I should certainly be very sorry for one of these men to make the attempt and come to grief for want of nerve. Yet I am very reluctant to tax your kindness still further. Is there no other way?"

"Of getting up the body, you mean; for I am almost sure it is there."

"Yes."

"I do not think there is; and you would not like to leave it where it is."

"Certainly not. It is only a sentiment, perhaps, but it would seem the height of unkindness not to put the poor creature decently under the ground after all the years she has been with us; and the very suggestion of such a thing would be intolerable both to Lady Lindisfarne and my daughters, especially to Muriel, who was really warmly attached to Miss Joyce."

"It shall be done, Lord Lindisfarne; and do not think that you are overtaxing my kindness, as you put it; for I like to do things, and this, after all, is so small a thing to do."

"Be it so, then, Mr. Ryvington. But whatever you may say, I do not consider it a small thing to do; and you are placing us under obligations which we shall never be able to repay. But you will know how to take the will for the deed, and if ever the opportunity offers there shall be no lack of deed. Of that you may be assured."

Randle bowed. He could not think just then of any suitable answer, and was glad to be able to divert the conversation by pointing out to his companion the scene of the accident, whither they had now almost arrived, and explaining his plan of campaign.

The first thing to be done was the fixing of the cathead as nearly as possible in a direct line with the bush whereon the drapery, supposed to be that of Miss Joyce, could still be seen fluttering in the breeze, a work which Randle's forethought in providing the clamps rendered easy of accomplishment. For greater security the concern was further stayed with ropes, which were fastened to two stout fir trees hard by. The long rope was then run through the block, and Randle seated himself in his chair, which, by means of a strap passing round his body and the rope, was so arranged that he had the free use of his hands. He carried with him a revolver and a supply of cartridges for signalling purposes. One shot meant stop; two, go on lowering; three, hoist up. As there was no winding tackle the rope would, of course, have to be paid out by hand. To Mr. Voules was assigned the duty of watching the cathead, and seeing that the men lowered steadily, and not too fast; while Lord Lindisfarne undertook to stand by the coil of rope and keep it from fouling, a duty for which his experience as a sailor well fitted him.

When these arrangements were completed the word was given to lower away, and Randle found himself swinging in face of a huge wall of rock of forbidding appearance, with the

purple sky above and the raging Rhone beneath him. The oscillation was his greatest difficulty, and the more the rope was paid out the worse it became. It was all he could do to keep himself from being dashed against the side and seriously hurt, for the rock was far from being as smooth as it appeared from above. It was seamed with age and the action of the weather, and abounded in sharp angles, hollows, and elevations, which rendered Randle's task much more onerous, and, as he confessed to himself, more dangerous than he had looked for. But he had little leisure for reflection—all his wits, as well as all his limbs, were in constant requisition. Nor was he the man to withdraw from any work to which he had once put his hand. The very strangeness of the position, moreover, had a charm for him—dangling between two mighty crags, in presence of the immensity of Nature, as much cut off from the world as if he had been in the bowels of the earth. The consciousness that his life hung on a frail rope that might at any moment be severed by a sharp corner of rock tended rather to give zest to his excitement than to damp his spirits. Men of adventurous temperament, high courage, and youthful energy find a pleasure in dangers which they can combat, and delight in perils that call forth their supremest capacities of action and endurance.

At length Randle, unhurt but breathless, found himself immediately above the place, where, as he could see, lay the body of the unfortunate Miss Joyce. He calculated the distance to a nicety, and a minute before he came level with the spot, fired the shot which was to give the signal of stoppage.

CHAPTER IV.

A DROP TOO MUCH.

VOULES, who was on the look-out, saw the flash before he heard the report.

"Stop!" he sang out.

"Höret auf!" shouted the courier.

The sound of the shot, faintly heard, was followed by a series of echoes, as if Randle were engaged in a combat with unseen foes.

"Has he found anything? Can you see what he is doing?" asked Lord Lindisfarne.

"I think he has found something; but what he is doing I cannot make out. It is growing dark down there, and objects are very indistinct."

"I daresay; the sun is getting low, and even at full noon there cannot be much light in that gorge."

A few minutes passed in complete silence, all listening intently, while Voules, with one hand on the cat head, looked down the precipice.

"One," said Voules, as a sharp flash of light shot upward in the deepening gloom, "two—three; hoist slowly."

"Hebt langsam auf," shouted the courier, and amid a volley of smothered echoes, the men began to pull the rope home, keeping in mind the caution to heave slowly, and a second exhortation, given by Lord Lindisfarne, to heave steadily.

"Pity we have not some sort of capstan," said the peer, after the pulling had been going on four or five minutes. "I don't much like this hand work. The men must jerk more or less, do as they will. Do they find it a heavy pull, courier?"

"Not as heavy as they expected, my lord. They are rather surprised at its lightness; for Mr. Ryvington is sure to be bringing the body up with him, I suppose?"

"No doubt, if he has found it; and Mr. Voules seems to be sure that he has. We shall soon know——"

"My God! what has happened?" exclaimed his lordship, as Voules uttered a cry of dismay, and the hoisters fell in a confused heap on the ground.

"The rope has parted," said Voules, hoarsely, in his agitation hardly able to speak, "and—and——"

"You surely don't mean that Ryvington has gone to the bottom—that he is killed?"

"I am afraid it is so, my lord," put in the courier. "See, the rope is quite slack; there is evidently no weight at the other end."

"And I saw it break," said Voules; "at least I saw the one end fly up and the other go down."

"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" muttered Lord Lindisfarne, "and he was so confident about there being no danger. I shall never forgive myself for allowing him to go down. I wonder who his friends are? Can we do nothing—is there no possibility of his being alive? Ask those men, courier; they know the place and the river. Ask them if there is no chance of saving him. He might swim, you know."

The courier shook his head.

"They say, my lord, that the gentleman could not possibly reach the water without striking against the side; that if he did, he could hardly miss striking against one of the huge boulders which lie in thousands in the bed of the river. And even supposing that, by a miracle, he has escaped these two dangers, the Rhone is so full of whirlpools, and it is so far to

any place where he could land, that swimming would be quite out of the question. They think, my lord, that there is not the least hope."

"Poor fellow! and, beyond his name, we know nothing of him. We shall have a sorrowful tale to tell when we get back to Viesch. It is very, very distressing."

"He was a brave fellow," said Voules, as a tear rolled down his cheek; "a fine fellow."

"A noble fellow; a young man of rare courage and presence of mind. He saved my daughter's life this morning, and now, in trying to do me a service, he has lost his own. What made the rope break, do you think? It seemed strong enough to carry three or four people."

"Cut by chafing against a sharp point of rock," said Voules, who by this time had got the remnant of rope hauled in. "See here."

"Yes, cut as if with a knife. What shall we do? How communicate with his friends? Poor young gentleman! What a death!"

And Lord Lindisfarne, who appeared deeply affected by Randle's tragic end, peered, shuddering, into the gulf; but so deep was the gloom that hardly anything could be seen, and beyond the beating of the wild waters of the river on the rocks beneath, nothing heard.

"The men are right, Mr. Voules, I fear," he remarked to the young Englishman, who was standing near him. "He is dead beyond a doubt, and I do not suppose we shall be able even to recover his body. Ah! what is that?"

A tongue of flame flashed for a moment in the darkness, followed at an interval of two or three seconds by a faint yet distinct crack, which startled all the echoes of the gorge, and they answered back as with muffled breath.

"It is he! He is not dead, then!" exclaimed the peer; "but where can he be? How has he escaped?"

By this time the courier and all the helpers were lying full length on the ground and craning over the brink of the precipice.

Then came another shot, followed by another round of echoes.

"The men think, my lord," said the courier, "that the gentleman was not on the rope when it broke; that he sent up the body of the lady first, thinking to follow himself afterwards, and that he is still on the ledge of rock where he found the body. That is the reason it was so much easier to haul up than the men expected. The pistol shot is to tell us that the gentleman is alive, and to ask for help."

"You think he is down there, clinging to a ledge of rock?"

Good heaven! what a position, and we here doing nothing! Lower the rope; tell the men to lower the rope at once, courier."

"It is a great deal too short, my lord; the greater part of it is broken off and fallen into the river."

"True, true; I had forgotten that. What shall we do, then? Look here, Mr. Voules. Will you kindly remain here with two or three of the men—you can send one of them to the nearest inn for some refreshment—and I will go with the courier and the others to Viesch for more rope? We shall use all possible speed, and be back, I hope, in two or three hours."

"Certainly, Lord Lindisfarne. I will remain with pleasure. But should we not do something to let Mr. Ryvington know that we have heard the shots, and that help is coming?"

"You are quite right. What shall we do? Shout?"

"I do not think he could hear a shout; the rush of the river would drown our voices, even if we were to shout our loudest and all together. We must answer his light with another light. I will see if I cannot manufacture a torch out of paper and some of these rotten fir branches that are lying about, and then we will make a bonfire, the glare of which he is sure to see."

"Very well; I will leave all that to you. The sooner we get away the sooner shall we be able to deliver Mr. Ryvington from his purgatory in that terrible gorge."

CHAPTER V.

LEFT SITTING.

THE thing Randle had taken for a bush proved to be a stunted fir tree. It grew on a narrow ledge of rock—too narrow to give a man foothold, yet wide enough to hold a bit of soil wafted thither by the wind. Here the tree had taken root, and solidly anchored itself by shooting its tough tentacles into the interstices of the cliff. On this shrub—for it was little more—Miss Joyce had fallen, and, as Randle at once saw, life was utterly extinct. Her poor body was fearfully mangled. He shuddered as he looked at it, and almost regretted that he had not yielded to Lord Lindisfarne's advice, and let some other person undertake the job. But the hesitation was only momentary, and after a few minutes' thought he addressed himself to his task. His original idea had been to fasten the body under his seat with the loop he had caused to be made for the purpose, and carry it up with him. But when he recalled the difficulties of the descent,

and thought of the increased stress on the rope the ghastly burden would entail—for Miss Joyce was a much bigger woman than he had expected—he altered his plan. He resolved to send the body up first, and wait where he was until the arm-chair, as he had jokingly called it to Lord Lindisfarne, could be lowered a second time.

It was a choice of evils, and, like a wise man, he chose the one that seemed to him the least. The body going up alone would doubtless get a good deal knocked against the rocks, but that was decidedly a smaller evil than getting knocked about himself, and, perhaps, badly hurt, to say nothing of the greater strain on the rope and the risk of its breaking, while the poor governess would be none the worse for a few additional bruises.

Having arrived at this resolution, Randle hooked the body to the rope, placed himself on the stunted fir-tree, and gave the preconcerted signal to hoist, by discharging two barrels of his revolver.

He found the shrub decidedly less comfortable than the seat he had just quitted. That at least was a seat; this was literally a perch, and about as unpleasant a perch as could well be. In the first place it was exceedingly rough, and covered with little branches, which made a very bad substitute for cushions. In the next place, he could not sit sideways for fear of losing his balance and falling headforemost into the Rhone, which, as he reckoned, was a good hundred yards below him. So he was obliged to straddle.

Now, sitting astride of a horse, or a tree trunk of respectable dimensions, is one thing; straddling across a stunted fir tree, half way down a precipice a thousand feet deep, with nothing save space between yourself and a raging flood, is quite another thing. It is not easy to get a good grip of a thing not more than three or four inches in diameter, and Randle's perch was so painfully narrow that, in order to preserve his balance, he was constrained to lean forward and grasp the tree firmly with his hands. It was "sitting on a rail" with a vengeance, Randle said to himself, and he did not care how soon the penance was at an end. He might have to endure it some twenty minutes, he thought, that being about the time it would take to hoist up the body and let down the "arm-chair."

As he arrived at this conclusion he heard a noise overhead; but before he could raise his head to look, something whizzed closely past him—so closely that, in the involuntary movement he made to avoid it, he almost lost his equilibrium. Following the object with his eyes, which had now become accustomed to the obscurity, he saw the fated body of poor Miss Joyce, after bounding from point to point of the rocky wall, plunge into the

milk-white water of the Rhone. Then he looked upward and saw the broken end of the rope dangling in mid air.

"What an escape!" he murmured, breathing at the same time a prayer of thankfulness to the Divine Being, to whose interposition he ascribed his escape.

It was only by degrees, as his preoccupation subsided, that he realised the full peril of his position; but as he looked down through the gloom towards the cruel foam of the surging flood, and upward to the unreachable brink of the precipice, his heart for a moment failed him, and he doubted if he should ever again put foot on solid earth. But he quickly shook off his despondency. "If my hour had come," he thought, "I should not be here now; I should have gone up with the body—and down with it. It will be time to despair when I can do nothing else. I can hold on an hour yet. But I must let them know up there that I am still alive, and in need of help." And with that he drew his pistol and fired the two last shots it contained. But he had still a few cartridges left.

Then he began to consider his position with a view to making it safer and more endurable, for, roused by his danger to greater sharpness of observation, he perceived that the impact of Miss Joyce's body had greatly impaired the integrity of the tree. Some of its roots had been torn from their fastenings, and, when he moved, it yielded to his weight in a way that was anything but reassuring. He thought, too—albeit this apprehension may have rendered him fanciful—that the tree was sinking, very slightly, perhaps, yet still perceptibly giving way under his weight. Whether ill or well founded, the idea was not a pleasant one, and he resolved to lessen the pressure, and get some support for his back, by turning round and creeping nearer the rock. The operation was a sufficiently ticklish one, for even when sitting still he had a difficulty in keeping his balance; and if his surmise as to the condition of the tree were correct, every movement would tend to make it still more precarious. When he swung his leg round the branch bent and creaked in a way that would have made a more nervous man give pause; but Randle went on, and when he reached the rock, and leaned against the ledge and the roots, he was pleased to see that the shrub, relieved from a portion of his weight, raised its drooping head by several inches.

Though the change rendered Randle's position more tolerable and much safer than it had been, it was still one of extreme discomfort. His legs, arms, and back ached to a degree that nobody who has not undergone the experience of sitting astride the slender branch of a tree for a considerable time can have any idea of. He could not lean against the rock for long together,

as not only were its angles and projections painfully sharp, but water trickled down it, and he was soon wet to the skin. Then it grew bitterly cold; for although the day had been warm the sun's rays reached the depths of the ravine during only a few hours of the twenty-four; and the river brought with it a wind keen enough, as Randle thought, to have been iced by the glaciers in which the Rhone had its birth. But few predicaments are so bad that they might not be worse, and, rightly regarded, there are no evils without their consolations. As luck would have it, Randle had his pipe with him, tobacco, and matches; and after several vain essays he succeeded in striking a light and treating himself to a smoke. The moment this match went out—and as it might seem in answer thereto—there came a red glare overhead, brightly reflected in the opposite side of the abyss, in which he rightly read a response to his signal and an intimation that help was not far off.

Then he thought of the varied incidents of the day, of the strange contrast they offered to the somewhat monotonous routine of his life at home, and how seemingly trivial incidents lead sometimes to momentous results. Who could have supposed that his sleep in the wood, and the tinkling of the diligence bells, would be the means of saving the life of an earl's daughter and bringing his own into deadly peril? for what purpose time alone could tell. For Randle Ryvington firmly believed in a divine influencing of human affairs, and his early training had given his character somewhat of a bent towards fatalism, which subsequent circumstances had tended rather to confirm than relax.

Then he thought of his past life, of the incidents of his Swiss tour, of Whitebrook, of business, of a hundred things besides—until little by little a feeling of intense drowsiness overcame him, his ideas grew faint and confused, his head drooped, and he fell into a dose from which he awoke with a start so violent that he almost lost his hold of the tree and fell down the precipice. But the heaviness—in which he recognised an effect of the bitter cold—still clung to him, and so great was his inclination to sleep that even the consciousness that to indulge in it would be death hardly sufficed to keep him awake. He shook himself, he let the water from the rock trickle down his back, he tried to count and identify the stars in the narrow strip of purple sky that vaulted the gulf; he reckoned over and over again how soon he might be released from his strange prison; he struck match after match to see how sped the time; he smoked all the tobacco in his pouch.

At length, when he had exhausted all these and sundry other devices, and had begun to feel that, die or not, he must sleep,

he heard what seemed to his fevered mind like voices from the stars, and, looking upwards, he saw lights in violent agitation.

The sight gave him new courage: his sleepiness vanished like a dream; he knew that relief was at hand.

A few minutes later the lights began to descend.

Randle loaded his pistol so that he might give the signals.

As the lights drew nearer he perceived that they came from two torches fastened to the cradle, or seat, in which he was to be carried to *terra firma*. In his excitement he stood up, and placed one foot on the shrub, the other on the ledge of rock, a feat that in cool blood, and by daylight, he had hardly dared to attempt.

The moment was an anxious one, for the rope carrying little weight it oscillated considerably, and the cradle might easily pass so wide of the fir tree as to be beyond his grasp. When it reached the level of his shoulder he gave the signal, and a few seconds thereafter it stopped.

What he feared had come to pass. The cradle, swaying to the right, was prevented by a roughness of the rock, or some other obstruction from returning to where Randle stood. Reaching it was out of the question. It was two yards off, at least.

There was only one way, as he thought, of meeting the emergency. He gave the signal to pay out more rope, and returning the revolver to his pocket, braced himself for the desperate effort he had resolved to make. When the cradle reached the level of the tree it came a little nearer, and Randle, after measuring the distance with his eye, leaped boldly towards it, and succeeded in grasping the wood-work with both hands. As one of the torches, dislodged by the shock, fell through the darkness, leaving behind it a scattering route of sparks, Randle found himself dangling in mid air, while the cradle, still descending, swayed violently to and fro. But he retained his presence of mind and kept his hold; and after steadying the rope by planting his legs against the rock, he succeeded, without much difficulty, in mounting to his seat, when he lost no time in firing the signal to hoist. The next moment he was moving in the opposite direction, and although in constant apprehension of the rope again parting, he reached the goal without further mishap, save a slight bruising of his hands and face against the rock.

CHAPTER. VI.

WORDS OF GRATITUDE.

As Randle stepped from his cradle into the full light of a blazing fire, he was greeted with loud cheers. The news that an Englishman was holding on to a fir tree half way down the bed of the Rhone had spread far and wide, and the road was crowded with people from Viesch and Munster, who had come to witness his deliverance or shudder over his fate. Among them were several carriages, in one of which were seated Lady Lindisfarne and her two elder daughters.

This was more than Randle had bargained for, and he felt somewhat embarrassed at being under the necessity, in his present not very presentable condition, of appearing before so distinguished a company. And he looked worse than he knew. His hat was gone, his hair dishevelled, his face blackened with smoke and streaked with blood, and his clothes were wet, dirty, and torn.

But if he had been a prince returning from a successful war he could hardly have received a warmer welcome. Voules was the first to greet him. Then the rough-handed, hearty fellows who had been pulling the rope insisted on shaking his hand and complimenting him on his courage. It was some minutes before Lord Lindisfarne could find an opportunity of offering his congratulations, and leading him to the countess and the ladies Maude and Muriel, to receive their congratulations.

All this embarrassed Randle exceedingly. He would much rather have been allowed to go quietly away, as he said to himself, without fuss. But it was not to be.

"You are a brave man, Mr. Ryvington," said Lady Lindisfarne, after he had assured her, in answer to her inquiries, that he was none the worse, and that the wounds on his face and hands were the merest scratches, and she had expressed her satisfaction at his escape. "We shall never forget how much we owe you—shall we, girls?"

"Never," said Lady Maude, emphatically. "We shall never be able to thank Mr. Ryvington enough."

"Never," murmured Lady Muriel, softly. "He saved me from a terrible death, and I shall be grateful to him all my life long."

"And he has increased the obligation by risking his life a second time to recover poor Miss Joyce's body," continued the countess. "I blame my husband very much for having allowed you to undertake such a dangerous task; but he says you

were so determined, and that you both thought there was no risk."

"It was quite my own doing, Lady Lindisfarne. Lord Lindisfarne did his best to dissuade me, but I would not let myself be dissuaded. As for risk, all I can say is that I was very much mistaken. Had I known what I know now, I greatly doubt if I should have made the attempt."

"But you did make the attempt, and the danger is too evident to be denied; so evident, indeed, that I shudder to think of it. I am sure if I had been here I should neither have allowed you nor anyone else to run so frightful a risk."

"I do not regret having made the attempt, Lady Lindisfarne. I only regret not having succeeded. We have lost poor Miss Joyce's body after all."

"I know and am very sorry; but poor Miss Joyce will be none the worse; and as you have saved a life to-day you have good reason for contentment, and we, I am sure, have great cause for thankfulness."

She accompanied these words with a glance at her daughter, who, while murmuringly echoing her mother's words, bent a look at Randle so eloquent with gratitude that he felt more than rewarded for all the perils he had undergone. He did not say so, however, for just as he was thinking how to put his thoughts into speech Lord Lindisfarne came bustling up.

"Come, come," exclaimed the peer, whose countenance rather suggested that he had a weakness for good cheer, "this will not do at all, you know. You are forgetting that Mr. Ryvington has been holding on to that fir bush four or five hours, that he is sure to be cold, and cannot fail to be hungry. He must have something to eat and drink forthwith. Hallo, courier, bring hither the hamper."

The hamper was brought accordingly, its contents were unpacked, and Randle, who was quite as hungry as Lord Lindisfarne thought, seating himself, by order of the countess, next to her and opposite to Lady Muriel, made a vigorous attack on a cold fowl, which he washed down with some excellent *vin du pays* mixed with water from a neighbouring well.

Then as a substitute for a hat Lady Muriel with her own hands bound round his head, turban-wise, a soft white shawl, which they all declared became him amazingly.

"May I keep it as a memento of the day?" asked Randle.

"Of course you may," said the countess, with a keen glance, first at him, then at Muriel; "but I should like to give you some worthier memento than a shawl."

"The worth of a memento consists in its associations," answered Randle, sententiously.

"You are quite right," observed Lady Maude; "and that shawl will serve to remind you that you saved my sister's life."

"I shall not require reminding, Lady Maude. Never, so long as I live, can I forget the events of to-day."

"Nor I," said Lady Muriel, softly.

"None of us will ever forget, Mr. Ryvington, the service you have this day rendered us. Gracious heaven! but for you my child would have been down there in that terrible gorge with poor Miss Joyce! What a fate!"

And, as if the picture her imagination had summoned up was more than she could bear, the countess, with a visible shudder, drew her shawl about her and sank back into her seat.

CHAPTER VII.

FORGET ME NOT.

LOED LINDISFARNE made particular inquiry the next morning as to the likelihood of recovering Miss Joyce's body. Opinions greatly differed. It might be found the very next day; it might not be found for days and weeks; and it was far from improbable that it might never be found at all. The river was extremely high, and running with rapid-like swiftness. The body might be carried down without once rising to the surface, and buried under the sand and mud which the Rhone is constantly discharging into the Lake of Geneva.

In these circumstances Lord Lindisfarne did not think it necessary to remain any longer at Viesch. After offering a reward for the finding of the body, which he caused to be extensively advertised, and arranging with the local authorities that, in the event of the body being recovered, it should be decently buried, and himself at once informed of the circumstance, he and his family, accompanied by Randle, went on to Brigue.

Here they had to part, for the Lindisfarnes were bound for Zermatt, and Randle, who telegraphed for his letters to Ouchy, said that he must leave by the first train next morning for Bouveret, on his way to England. He pleaded pressing engagements as a reason for not accepting Lord and Lady Lindisfarne's invitation to spend a few days with them at Zermatt.

"At any rate, Mr. Ryvington," said the earl, as they were about to separate for the night—the early hour at which Randle intended to leave in the morning rendering it improbable that they would meet again before his departure—"you will favour us with an early visit at Avalon Priory?"

"Oh, yes, you must come, Mr. Ryvington; we will take no denial. There is no compulsion, you know—only you must," added the countess, with a smile.

Lady Muriel made no remark, but Randle read in her expressive eyes a warmer and more sincere promise of welcome than that which her mother had spoken.

"You are very kind, Lady Lindisfarne; I am sure I shall be very happy to visit you some time at Avalon Priory," answered Randle.

"Have you Mr. Ryvington's address, Reginald?" asked the countess of her husband, "that we may write to him when we return home."

"Yes; I have his card in my pocket. He gave it me a few minutes ago. We shall probably spend the greater part of the summer in Switzerland, Mr. Ryvington, but immediately we get back to the Priory you shall hear from us. We shall expect a long visit, you know."

"I fear I may not be able to spare time for a very long visit, Lord Lindisfarne; I am rather a busy man. But at any rate, whatever may be my engagements, when I hear from you I will come."

And then they said good night and good-bye.

As Randle stepped out of the Hôtel de la Poste shortly after six the following morning, on his way to the station, he thought he heard a soft voice calling his name. Looking upwards, whence the sound seemed to come, he perceived at a window which opened on a balcony the charming face of Lady Muriel. She held in her hand a bunch of forget-me-nots, and was bidding him a last good-bye and wishing him a pleasant journey.

"You will be sure to come to Avalon?" she said, and as she leaned over the balcony one half her bunch of forget-me-nots fluttered to the ground and fell at Randle's feet.

"I have promised, Lady Muriel; I am sure to come," answered Randle, as he stooped to pick up the forget-me-nots.

Then he stood uncovered for a moment before the balcony and bowed his adieux. When he turned his head for the last time, before losing sight of the hotel, Lady Muriel was still at the window, holding in her hand the remainder of the forget-me-nots.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON LAKE LEMAN.

THE railway from Brigue to Bouveret, although it bears the imposing name of "Ligne d'Italie," and, in all probability, is destined sooner or later to make good its designation by linking together Switzerland, France, and Italy, and forming part of a great highway between England and the East, is chiefly remarkable at present for the preternatural slowness of its trains. If the management, as has been suggested, are trying experiments with a view to seeing how slowly trains can be made to go, it must be admitted that they have achieved a great success.

Though the distance Randle had to travel on this sleepy line was not more than eighty or ninety miles, it was almost noon when he reached his destination—Bouveret, at the head of Lake Lemman—whence he proposed to proceed by water to Nyon, where he had a call to make before continuing his journey homeward.

The day was all that could be desired. The sky was clear and blue, the higher mountains were of a dazzling whiteness, and as the azure wavelets of the lake danced in the sunlight they sparkled like liquid diamonds.

The view from the deck of the steamer was superb, and Randle—who had an inquiring mind—eager to know the names of some of the peaks around him, put a question, in what he imagined to be the French tongue, to one of the crew.

"I don't understand English, monsieur," said the fellow, with a deprecatory shake of his head.

Randle bit his lip. Not to be understood is a common experience, but to have your French taken for English is somewhat humiliating; above all, when you have carefully prepared your sentence beforehand and said it over several times in your head before letting it see daylight.

"These men are really too stupid," said a voice near him. "That snow-clad mountain before us is the Dent du Midi; the other is the Dent de Morcles. The strangely-shaped one with the two peaks, like two horns, is the Dent d'Oche; and the mountain above Chillon yonder, where you see vineyards, meadows, châteaux, and forests, surmounted by a fantastically-formed rock, that is the Col de Jamant. The others are the Moine and the Naze."

This was spoken rapidly and in excellent English, albeit the intonation and accent had a decidedly foreign ring.

"Thank you very much," said Randle, turning to the speaker,

whom he was surprised, now he looked at him, not to have noticed before; for his appearance was rather striking.

Tall, and rather slightly built, a nut-brown beard hung low on his breast. He had regular features, but a complexion almost devoid of colour, and his eyes were so dark that the pupils of them could hardly be distinguished from the iris. When he smiled he displayed a row of brilliantly white teeth, the upper parts of two of them being covered or adorned with two thin crescent-shaped plates of gold. The face seemed to Randle, albeit its owner was evidently little older than himself, that of a man who had suffered. It showed much power and courage, yet it wore, when in repose, an expression of wistful sadness which both won Randle's sympathy and roused his curiosity. What could have happened to this man, still in the heyday of youth, to stamp his features with as deep a shade of melancholy as if he had drunk the cup of life's bitterness to the dregs?

These thoughts passed rapidly through Randle's mind as he gazed in the direction indicated by the stranger.

"And that point in the far distance, right away to the south, slightly powdered with snow?"

"That is the beginning of the St. Bernard range. One of the lower spurs—I have heard the name often enough, but just now I cannot recall it."

"Thank you very much. It is of no importance. You have told me more already than I shall probably remember. You seem to be well acquainted with this part of the country?"

"Yes; I like it. I often make the tour of the lake."

"I am not surprised at that, if you live in the neighbourhood. If I lived hereabouts, I think I should always be on the water—in weather of this sort, pretty often in it. I suppose you are Swiss."

"I have not the privilege, for it is a privilege, to be a native of the freest of European countries. It was my misfortune to be born in Russia, where there is no freedom, neither in fact nor in name."

"Oh, you are a Russian. No; I do not suppose there is too much liberty in the dominion of the Czar, though, to own the truth, Russia is not a country I know much about."

"That is well for you. Fuller knowledge of the country would not tend to increase either your respect for it or for human nature. Russia is a prey to tyranny. Its masses are sordidly ignorant; its upper classes either frivolous or corrupt; the few who dare to utter a word of remonstrance, or point out the way to reform, are sent into exile or consigned to a dungeon."

This was spoken with much warmth, yet the stranger's mobile face and kindling eye were even more eloquent of indignation and disgust than his words.

"I could a tale unfold," he continued more quietly; "but I must not; I am under a promise. I must correct you on one point, however. You called me just now a Russian. I am not a Russian."

"I beg your pardon, but I thought you said you were born in Russia?"

"So I was; yet I am no Russian. I have abjured my nationality. My country has cast me off, so I cast it off. I have no country; I am a cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world. Do you mark how the vast volume of the Rhone rushes, arrow-like, into the lake, and changes in a moment its turbid whiteness into translucent blue? A curious sight, is it not? Let us go nearer the stern that we may have a better view of it."

It was a curious sight, and interested Randle greatly; but his curiosity was less piqued by the natural phenomenon to which the citizen of the world called his attention than by the startling way in which that gentleman, without pause or change of voice or any apparent reason whatever, had gone, metaphorically speaking, from Russia to the Rhone.

"They say," continued the stranger, as Randle and he crossed the deck, "that the lake is blue because the river is white; that the colouring matter which gives the water its beautiful tint is contained in the powdered rock ground by the glaciers and brought down by the stream. I daresay there is some truth in the theory, for no lakes that I know of, fed by springs or clear streams, are blue as Lake Lemman is blue."

"It is perhaps the mingling together of 'glacier milk' and clear water—there are clear streams flowing into the lake, I suppose—that produces the colour."

"That is very likely, I should think. And now" (lowering his voice and giving a glance over his shoulder), "I suppose you would like to know why I changed the subject of our conversation so very abruptly. It was very kind of you to take the hint. You followed my cue admirably."

"I followed you, if I did not follow your cue," replied Randle, with a smile. "I did think it rather strange, but I presumed you had a reason."

"I had. Did you observe that man who came and sat down near to us and pretended to be reading a newspaper?"

"Do you mean that stout little fellow with a game eye and a bottle nose?"

"Exactly. Well, unless I am much mistaken, that fellow is a spy."

"God bless me! a spy?" returned Randle, considerably astonished. "Spies in this country! Why, you said just now that Switzerland was the freest of European countries."

"So it is. But that man is a Russian, not a Swiss, spy. He is a servant of His Imperial Majesty the Autocrat of All the Russias, King of Poland, Duke of Finland, and I don't know what besides. You are perhaps not aware that the Russian Government have a regular police bureau at Geneva, and a full staff of detectives, whose chief—I should rather say sole—duty it is to watch the poor fellows who eat here the bitter bread of exile—men, most of them, of whom their country was not worthy—until it shall please Heaven—. But, see, that cursed *mouchard* is creeping round this way. Let us promenade round the deck awhile, and when we pass him I will change the subject."

"Do you know the man?"

"I never saw him before in my life, but he has been described to me by those who know him only too well. Besides, I recognise *mouchards* the moment I set eyes on them. An unerring instinct tells me when I am in their presence. I believe I could scent them in the dark. I remember once at St. Petersburg—. Yes, that is Chillon Castle. You remember Byron:

"Lake Lemán lies by Chillon's walls:
A thousand feet in depth below
Its massy waters meet and flow;
Thus much the fathom-line was sent
From Chillon's snow-white battlement,
Which round about the wave enthralls."

"Snow-white battlements! That is poetic license, I suppose? A dirty yellow I call them."

"You are too matter-of-fact, Monsieur l'Anglais. You forget that poets view things through a medium of their own. What is imagination worth if it cannot transmute dirty yellow into snow white?"

"Especially when dirty yellow will not scan. Yellow will, though, and it would not sound badly either.

"From Chillon's yellow battlement."

"Perhaps it was really snow-white when Byron saw it. Let us suppose so. You were saying that once at St. Petersburg—?"

"Yes; I was going to tell you of a little adventure I once had with a spy—one of many; a trifling incident enough in itself, but it will serve to show you how wary one has to be. I was on my way to a secret printing-office with some manuscript in my pocket, a little matter I had written for distribution among the peasants, in which I tried to show how greatly their economical

condition was susceptible of improvement, and to explain what is meant by constitutional government, and to set forth its advantages. There was nothing alarming in it—no advocacy of violence or revolution; but no printer could have printed it openly without the risk—the certainty, rather—of having his establishment shut up by the police and being himself imprisoned, and, as likely as not, sent off to Siberia. So I had to take my manuscript to a clandestine office belonging to the political society of which I was a member. I did not go the most direct way, as you may suppose. I was already suspected of revolutionary tendencies—in other words, of entertaining doubts as to whether ours was the best of all possible governments, and the Czar an earthly deity—and I knew the police had their eye on me. Well, I had not gone far when I saw before me a man, in the dress of a peasant, looking through a shop window. There was nothing unusual in this, and the fellow had the appearance of a real moujik; but I felt at once—something told me—that he was a spy, and had been sent to watch me. I knew that unless I could get rid of him it would be madness to go to the printing-office, and I wanted particularly to go; not so much about my 'copy,' which could wait, as that I expected to find a friend there whom I wanted to see. I had heard he was in danger of arrest, and it was necessary to warn him. So I resolved on a bold stratagem. Instead of trying to dodge my *mouchard*—an attempt in which I should probably have failed—I spoke to him, asked him if he wanted a job. He pretended to be very much delighted at the idea, and said he would be glad to do anything for me. Then I walked on and told him to follow me, looking ever and anon over my shoulder, as if I were in dread of being followed. Telling the man to wait outside, I went into a café which had the reputation of being frequented by revolutionary characters. I looked about me as if I expected to find somebody, and then with a gesture of disappointment called for pen and paper and wrote a note. I knew, of course, that my spy was carefully scanning all my movements through the window. After sealing, not simply gumming, my letter (it was merely an invitation to dinner, and a word or two in cypher) I went outside, gave it to the false peasant with a handsome gratuity, told him to take it to its destination, and bring me back an answer. Then I re-entered the café, but the moment he was out of sight I ran to the printing-office, gave in my copy, spoke a few words to my friend, and then walked quickly home."

"Are you sure the man was a spy? I don't think he was very sharp to let you get rid of him so easily."

"I don't think he was. Spies are often very stupid people, I think. But you see this fellow fancied he would find valuable

information in that letter, and was in a hurry to turn it to account."

"Did he deliver it?"

"Oh, yes, after it had been opened and read."

"You saw the seal had been tampered with, I suppose?"

"Yes, and very clumsily tampered with."

"So there was no mistake about the fellow's being a spy?"

"None. He was that and more."

"That and more; what do you mean?"

"He was a traitor," said the Russian savagely, his face darkening with a look of hatred that made Randle shudder. "My friend recognised him as one of ours. He had been affiliated to the society at Kieff, and entered the service of the police at St. Petersburg, where he thought nobody knew him, the hound. But Paul Demidoff saw through his designs at once, and——"

"What became of him?" asked Randle, seeing that the Russian did not seem disposed to complete the sentence.

"Became of whom—Paul Demidoff?"

"No; of the spy."

"He was found a few days afterwards in the Neva with a bullet in his brain," said the Russian, speaking slowly and almost in a whisper.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Randle, with a horror-struck look, "you don't mean that you——"

"Oh dear, no," rejoined the other indifferently. "I had nothing to do with it. I only read of the incident in the newspapers. I would not have soiled my hands by touching the wretch. But—ah, here is Montreux and Glion; a little farther on is Clarens.

"Clarens! sweet Clarens, birthplace of deep love!
Thine air is the young breath of passionate thought;
Thy trees take root in love; the snows above
The very glaciers have his colours caught."

"Byron again! You are better up in Byron than I am. I have dipped into his poems from time to time, but I never studied them, or got 'Childe Harold' off by heart, as you seem to have done."

"I can easily believe that Byron is not esteemed by his countrymen as he deserves; and unless I am greatly at fault, he is much more read abroad than at home; perhaps because he is the poet of freedom and passion, and of the little respect he shows for the great ones of the earth. Freedom you English have in a great measure gained, and are, therefore, no longer enthusiastic about it—though you are not quite so free as you

sometimes think yourselves—and passion and irreverence are qualities that do not command your admiration. You are too respectable and conventional. But Byron is the poet of peoples who are fighting for freedom. How often in our secret midnight meetings have we repeated those magnificent lines of his that might have been written for Russia :

“ ‘ Yet, Freedom ! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,
Streams like the thunderstorm *against* the wind ;
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind ;
Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
Chopp'd by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
But the sap lasts—and still the seed we find
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North ;
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth. ’ ”

The stranger began the stanza in rather a low voice, but as he went on his excitement increased, and he repeated the last two or three lines in a style that made everybody look at him.

“ You are forgetting the spy,” whispered Randle, who was beginning to feel much interested in his new acquaintance.

“ He will not know that I am quoting Byron, and if he does it is of no importance. But I have thought of a way of getting rid of him. We shall be at Vevey in a few minutes.”

“ How ? ”

“ You will see. Only one thing—take as a matter of course anything I may do.”

“ All right. Do you suppose he knows English ? ”

“ Certainly. You may be sure the Russian Government would not go to the expense of sending—how do you say it?—duffers to Geneva. It would be too costly, and useless as that, as the Americans say.”

“ How well you speak English ! I quite envy your command of languages.”

“ As to my command of languages, there is nothing extraordinary in that : my own, that goes without saying ; and besides that, German, French, and a little Italian. German and French we learnt from our governesses without knowing that we were learning. English is my second mother tongue, for my mother was half English, and we had also an English governess. So if I did not know well your tongue I should be a very stupid fellow.”

“ You have been in England, of course ? ”

“ Never. But I hope—ah, here we are at Vevey. I will

now put my little plan into execution. If you do not object, we will resume our conversation afterwards."

And then the citizen of the world took off his hat, spoke a few words in French, and joined the throng of passengers who were hurrying across the gangway to the landing-stage.

"Why, he has gone," said Randle to himself. "I never knew such a thing in my life. How can he resume the conversation? I suppose that gibberish was meant for good-bye. Ah, he was right about that fellow, after all; he is landing too. How will he get rid of him, I wonder?"

By this time the Russian was on the landing-stage, and catching Randle's eye took off his hat a second time. Randle did the same. Then passengers began to come on board. When the last of them had embarked, and just as the men were beginning to unship the gangway, the Russian, who was a little beyond the supposed spy, whipped quickly round, and the next moment had regained the deck. The spy would have followed, but he was too late. Just as he put his foot on the gangway, the men, who had not seen him, pushed it back, the steamer began to move, and the *mouchard*, losing his balance, went head foremost into the water. Then ensued a terrible commotion; everybody ran to and fro, shouting vociferously, and told everybody else what to do without doing anything himself. If a lad who was fishing had not thrust into the man's hands a rod by which he held on until picked up by a small boat, he might have been drowned, for he did not seem to have much swim in him. The steamer stopped for a few minutes, but when the captain saw that the fellow was in safety he sang out "*En route*," the French equivalent for "Go ahead," an order that was promptly obeyed.

"That is better than I bargained for," said the Russian to Randle. "I meant to give him the slip, but I had no idea that he would take an involuntary header into the lake. It might have been better, though."

"How?"

"He might have been drowned."

"Do you mean that you would have let him drown?"

"My dear sir, I would not have raised a finger to help him," said the other, fiercely. "If I had the power I would drown every spy in existence—at any rate every Russian spy. You are shocked, I can see; but if you only knew what I—what some have suffered, you would not be surprised."

"Why was this man following you—have you any idea?"

"I suppose he has been ordered by the Third Section to write a report about me. They very likely want to know how I am spending my time—what I am doing, with whom I associate,

and, above all, if I meddle in any way with politics. These gentlemen of the Third Section are very curious, I assure you."

"But are all Russian gentlemen on their travels followed about in this way? It must take quite an army of spies, to say nothing of the expense."

"Oh dear, no, not all. Only a few of us are honoured in this way. Why I am one of the select few I may some time tell you—if we should ever meet again."

"And if you come to England, as I think you said a little while ago you intended to do, we may meet again."

"I am sure it would afford me much pleasure. Yes; I mean to visit England. I want to see the country, and I am particularly anxious to study the condition of the people."

"Do you mean of the working classes?"

"I do. The *proletariat*—peasants and people who live from hand to mouth. The highly educated, and what you call the upper classes, are pretty much alike everywhere; they are too monotonous. I don't care for them, and the *bourgeoisie* I detest. Traders, mammon worshippers, and such like, I have no sympathy with whatever; their lives are unlovely and their characters uninteresting."

"Is not that rather a hard judgment?" said Randle, with a smile. "My character may be uninteresting—I daresay it is; but I know some traders who are men of most original character. And, though the lives of some of us are unlovely in all conscience, that cannot truthfully be said of all. Besides, a trader is not necessarily a mammon worshipper."

"You speak warmly. I fear I have hurt your feelings. If so, I am very sorry; but I had really no idea you were a——"

"Mammon worshipper. Well, I hope I am not. Nevertheless, I am a trader, or, at least, a manufacturer, which is pretty much the same thing."

"I was thinking of people who merely traded, who created nothing. A manufacturer creates, and if he does not *exploite* his employés he may be a useful member of society and worthy of all respect."

"Well, I don't think we *exploite* our employés, if by that you mean getting all we can out of our hands, paying them the lowest wages they can be persuaded or forced to take, and then letting them go to the devil, if they are so minded. That is not our way, though I am sorry to say it is the way of some. But come and see for yourself. You will find some things to blame, but many things, I hope, to praise. And as to character, you will find as much originality among our Lancashire folks as in any part of England, perhaps more."

"You are from Lancashire, then? You are right; it is

socially the most interesting part of England. It is there, is it not, that the associative spirit among artisans has reached its highest development, where the system of co-operation both in production and distribution has been most successful? I thank you very much for your invitation. I accept it. I certainly will come."

"But you must know where to come. See, I have written my address on this card."

"Thank you. 'Mr. Randle Ryvington, Whitebrook, Lancashire.' I suppose I shall easily find Whitebrook—there is a railway?"

"Oh, you will find it right enough. Make for Manchester, and then ask for a ticket for Whitebrook; that is all you have to do."

"And when I arrive at your station I will demand to be directed to the house of Mr. Randle Ryvington?"

"No; I would not advise you to do that. Ask which is the way to 'Red Ryvington's,' or better still, take a cab and drive there."

"But here on the card is the name of Mr. Randle Ryvington, and you say ask for 'Red Ryvington'; that is rather droll, is it not?"

"I daresay you find it so; but the fact is I am better off than some people. I have two names—that given me by my god-fathers and godmother, and a post-baptismal one, by which I am best known in the town and district of Whitebrook; and as I am not the only Randle Ryvington it is rather a convenience than otherwise."

"Ah, I see," said the Russian, albeit he still seemed somewhat puzzled. "I will write 'Red Ryvington' on the back of the card, so that I may not forget it. And now permit me to give you my card."

It bore merely two words, "Sergius Kalougia."

"Being, as I have already mentioned, a wanderer, a sort of cosmopolitan vagabond," continued Kalougia, "I have no fixed address. My home is wherever I happen to be. At present it is at Divonne, a hydropathic establishment not far from Nyon, where I am making a cure of water."

"Nyon! Why, that is where I am going."

"Indeed! I fancied you were going to Geneva."

"I may afterwards, then on to Lausanne, but only to pass through on my way home. I must get back to my mammon worshipping, you know," laughed Randle.

"Come now, Mr. Ryvington, that is too bad. I never said you were a mammon worshipper; and I am sure you are not one. You have not the air."

"Thank you, Mr. Kalougia. I hope I have not the reality either. But about Nyon. Do you know a house there called—let me see—Villa Artemisia?"

"Yes; I pass it in driving to Divonne."

"Well, I have to make a call there. Perhaps you will be good enough to point it out to me?"

"With pleasure. I will, if it please you, do more. A carriage waits me near the landing-stage. You shall go with me as far as the Villa Artemisia, and I will put you down at the gate. It is a *pensionnat des demoiselles*, is it not? At least, I often see some very charming young ladies walking about."

"Yes; it is a young ladies' boarding-school, and I am going to see one of them."

"Your sister, probably?"

"No; the young lady I am going to see is not my sister. She——"

"*Tant mieux*—so much the better. You are in luck, Monsieur Ryvington. I congratulate you. But here we are at Nyon. If you have any baggage you would do well to look after it, I think."

CHAPTER IX.

VILLA ARTEMISIA.

VILLA ARTEMISIA was a large, old-fashioned house, with high-pitched roof, tall chimneys, rounded corners; and at one side rose a nondescript sort of thing bearing a faint resemblance to a tower. It was embowered in trees, and its general appearance was rather suggestive of a castle, or a baronial hall of stunted growth, than an educational establishment, and before Mademoiselle Vientemps turned it into a ladies' boarding-school, and changed its name to Villa Artemisia, it had been known in the neighbourhood as the Château de la Roche. Beautifully situated on the summit of a gentle acclivity, it commanded a superb view of the lake, the mountains of Faucigny, and the Pennine Alps, with the rocky ramparts of the Jura for background.

"You will not forget your promise?" said Randle, as Kalougia put him down at the outer gate of Villa Artemisia.

"I will not forget. You may count on seeing me sooner or later, and rather sooner than later, at Whitebrook. *Au revoir*. I wish I was going to visit a beautiful young lady."

"*Au revoir*," said Randle, and opening the gate he walked briskly up the fine avenue of chestnut-trees that led to the villa, while the Russian drove rapidly towards Divonne.

When Randle arrived at the house he rang the bell, and, handing his card to the smart *bonne* who answered his summons, demanded an interview with Miss Dora Ryvington.

"Perfectly, monsieur," said the girl. "Will monsieur give himself the trouble to enter."

Randle entered accordingly, and presently found himself in a room quaint as the house itself, and very charming. There were two windows at each end, reaching from floor to ceiling. One set looked into a garden, gay with flowers and rich with trailing vines and heavily-laden fruit-trees; the other looked over the lakes, the mountains, and the Alps. A few old pictures, the subjects mostly rural, hung on the walls. The furniture, all of antique design, was upholstered in crimson cloth, and the dark oaken floor so brightly polished that walking across it, for the unpractised, was quite a risky undertaking. The tables, the nick-nacks on them, the cabinets, the clock on the mantelpiece, the mirrors, more numerous than the pictures, were in perfect keeping. The only modern thing in the room was the piano: for the books, albeit the literary part of them was comparatively modern, were bound in old-fashioned style to match the furniture.

Randle sat down in a *fauteuil* and took up one of the books, in which he soon became so absorbed that he did not notice the opening of the door; and on hearing an eager, silvery voice speak his name, he looked round in momentary surprise.

"Randle!"

"Dora!"

Then he rose, took both the girl's hands in his and gave her a cousinly kiss.

"How well you are looking, Dora. Why, I do believe you have grown." There was no mistake about her looking well. She looked bright and happy, too, and delighted at seeing her cousin. Dora was eighteen, tall and sylph-like. Face and head rather small, but exquisitely formed. Dark hair, rich complexion, small mouth, a good nose, yet perhaps a little too large to be in perfect keeping with the rest of her features, and large grey eyes, full of fire and animation.

"Do you think so? Well, you are quite right," said Dora, giving a fleeting glance at herself in one of the many mirrors that adorned the walls. "I have had to let my frocks out a full inch since I came here, and I do believe I am growing yet. I am so glad; I want to be tall. How are they all at home?"

"Very well, when I heard last. But I daresay your news is later than mine."

"I had a letter yesterday. Nothing new, except that either Randle or papa is coming for me next year."

"Then I suppose you are perfect in French?"

"Oh dear, no, not perfect. One may easily know French pretty well, but to learn it perfectly, to be able to write a good style without faults, is extremely difficult. What do you think Professor Maigre said to me yesterday? and he thought he was paying me a compliment, poor man! He said if Mademoiselle Reevington would stay in Switzerland one more year and talk and write during that time nothing but French, she would know the language *passablement pour une anglaise!*"

"Not very flattering, I must say. But you will know enough to pass muster at Whitebrook."

"Whitebrook! I should think so, indeed. Why, who is there at Whitebrook, except Monsieur Hubert and his daughter, that can speak French fluently? And though I cannot write to satisfy Monsieur Maigre, I speak it easily and *presque sans accent, je t'assure.*"

"You must not despise Whitebrook folks, Dora. You know you are one of them, though you do live at Deepdene."

"You quite mistake me, Ran; it is not that at all. I am not proud, I despise nobody. I like the farmers and people about Deepdene, and the factory folks at Whitebrook, but some of the masters I do not like at all; they are vulgar, purse-proud, and pretentious."

"Not all, Dora; not all."

"I did not say all. I only said some; and I think the brewers, rich as they are, are worse than the manufacturers and shopkeepers."

"Why, Dora, what books have you been reading—where have you got your ideas? You might have been talking with Mr. Kalougia."

"Mr. Kalougia! who is he? But here comes Mademoiselle Vientemps; you must be very polite to her," whispered the girl to Randle, as the schoolmistress entered the room.

Whereupon the cousin made a profound bow, which the lady acknowledged with a courtly *révérence*.

Mademoiselle Vientemps was about sixty years old, *petite* as touching her person, yet with enough of vigour for a woman half her age. Though her hair was almost white, her fresh and rosy face showed hardly a wrinkle; and her keen dark eyes could still read a character and detect a fault of French composition at a glance. Her toilette was perfection. As Randle said to himself, she looked like a picture, and ought to have been kept in a gold frame.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Ryvington," she said, out of consideration for her guest speaking the best English she could muster. "I hope you find your sister looking good?"

"Dora is——"

Here Dora, who was behind Mademoiselle Vieutemps, gave Randle a glance which it was impossible to misunderstand, even if she had not supplemented it by placing her finger on her lips.

So instead of saying, "Dora is not my sister," as he was about to do, he said, "Dora is looking remarkably well, Mademoiselle Vieutemps, as I was just telling her; and no wonder, for the Villa Artemisia must be as healthy as its situation is superb."

"Yes; as you say, monsieur, the situation is superb," answered the schoolmistress, evidently much pleased with the compliment, "and all my girls do enjoy the very best of health. And your sister does not fret for her home; she is very happy and *mignonne*, very darling, we all do love her very much; is it not so, *ma fille chérie*?"

"And I love you very much, dear Mademoiselle Vieutemps. I shall be glad to go home, because home is always home, you know, but I do not think I shall ever in all my life be so happy as I have been at Villa Artemisia; and if papa will let me I shall come and see you every year."

"And you will always be very welcome, my cabbage," said the old lady, pinching the girl's fresh smooth cheek with her little white hand. "Do you make a long sojourn at Nyon, Monsieur Ryvington?"

"No. I must go on to-night, either to Geneva or Lausanne. In three or four days from this I should like to be at home."

"In that case you will have to leave by the half-past eight o'clock train. But we cannot let you go without offering you of our hospitality. I will order a little *gouter* [a light repast] for you. It shall be ready in an hour; that will leave you plenty of time. Meanwhile, Dora will perhaps show you round our grounds, let you see our vineyards and orchards, and take you for a little promenade in the village."

"May I, mademoiselle?"

"*Parfaitement*. Why not?"

"A thousand thanks, mademoiselle. I will run and put on my hat. I shall not keep you waiting three minutes, Ran."

CHAPTER X.

DORA.

DORA was as good as her word, and before Mademoiselle Vientemps had finished the little speech descriptive of the beauties of Villa Artemisia and its eminent suitability for a *pensionnat*, the young lady returned to the room hatted and gloved.

"I always keep my word, Ran," she said. "I am ready."

"Yes, Mademoiselle Dora, you are always very *punctuel*. And as your brother has so little of time at his disposition, and the repast I have ordered will soon be ready, you would do well to make your walk at once. It would be very sad if he were to depart without well seeing our vast and beautiful *campagne*."

"Why didn't you want me to say I was not your brother?" asked Randle, as soon as they were outside.

"Don't you know? Why, mademoiselle would not have let us be alone for three minutes; while as to walking with you *tête-à-tête*, she would rather have perished than permitted such a thing."

"But why?"

"It is their way here. And the French are stricter than the Swiss; and mademoiselle is French, you know. She would never think of letting the biggest girls in the school, even two together, leave the grounds unaccompanied by herself, a teacher, or a *bonne*. And it is not considered proper for a young girl to speak to a male cousin in the street if she happen to meet him alone; she must just nod and move on."

"That is absurd enough. At least it seems so, according to our English notions. But will not mademoiselle be annoyed when she knows what our relationship really is? I would not like to vex the old lady."

"Don't fidget; I will tell her afterwards. When it is done it will be all right, though she could not give her consent beforehand. She knows that English ideas in these matters are much less rigid than French; and when I assure her that aunt, or mamma, if she had been living, would have let me go out for a walk with my cousin, I do not think she will be angry. She is a dear, good creature. And now, give an account of yourself. Where have you been for the last three or four weeks, and what have you been doing?"

"Generally, knocking about in Switzerland. To descend to particulars, I have done the Wetterhorn, the Matterhorn, the Galenstock, Naegeli's Graetli, Mount Pilatus, and a variety of

smaller mountains. I have walked a good many score miles, visited Basle, Berne, Zurich, Lucerne, Thun, and Interlaken, and saved, or been the means of saving, the life of an earl's daughter, and made the acquaintance of a Russian revolutionist."

"Oh, how nice! But never mind about Matterhorn, Wetterhorn, and the other horns; tell me about saving the earl's daughter."

"What a brave, noble fellow you are, Ran," said Dora, looking at him admiringly when he had told her the story, in which, as she discerned, he had spoken very modestly of his own part in it. "I knew you were brave and good, but I did not know how brave and good. And now you must tell me more about Lady Muriel Avalon. How old is she? Is she pretty?"

"About your age—seventeen or eighteen. Yes, I think you would call her pretty."

"But give me a description of her. Is she tall or short, slim or stout? Tell me all about her this minute. If she is not good-looking, I shall be dreadfully disappointed."

"Well, she is slim, but neither tall nor short—rather between the two; though, if she be as young as I take her to be, she may grow a little yet."

"Come, go on. What sort of hair has she? What sort of a face?"

"Her hair is golden, complexion blond. Eyes brown and soft, with very long lashes; face oval, nose rather aquiline, dimpled chin, rosy mouth, and lofty forehead. Altogether, I should pronounce her a handsome, high-bred girl."

"I knew it," said Dora, with a merry laugh. "I knew it from the first. One never reads of plain girls being rescued, though I am sure I do not know why. Well, Ran, the next thing is for you to marry her."

"I marry Lady Muriel Avalon!" exclaimed Randle, looking as much surprised as if the possibility of such a consummation had been absolutely strange to his thoughts. "How very absurd! What could put such an idea into your head, Dora?"

"Everything. What could be more natural? You have saved her life. The least she can do is to give you her hand. Besides, it would only be—what do you call it?—poetic justice. When a lady is rescued by a gentleman, it seems the proper thing for her to marry her deliverer."

"But suppose the gentleman is bespoke, Dora?"

"Are you bespoke, Ran?" said Dora, with an arch look.

Randle laughed.

"I know you are not. You are only joking. Now, pay attention to what I say. You must marry Lady Muriel.

Think what an honour it would be to have an earl's daughter in the family! Why, you would be the greatest man in Whitebrook. You might get into Parliament, and I don't know what besides."

"All very fine, Dora; but suppose the daughter is not willing, and her father objects to her marrying a manufacturer—what then?"

"No fear about the daughter. She is in love with you already, take my word for it. I know girls better than you do, which is only natural, seeing that I am a girl myself. As for the father, I really don't see why he should object. You have placed him under a great obligation. We Ryvingtons are at least respectable; and papa and my brother, you know, have found out that ours is one of the oldest families in the kingdom. And really, Ran, I do not see that because a man happens to be an earl he is better than anybody else. Why should he be?"

"Why, you said only just now what an honour it would be to have an earl's daughter in the family."

"Well, so it would, in the eyes of the world. But, really, you know, it would amount to very little. Lady Muriel would not make you a better wife, love you more, or make you any happier, simply because she happens to have a title, than if she were plain Miss Muriel."

"That is exactly what I think myself, Dora. She might even make me a worse wife on that account. No, Dora, when I have made up my mind to marry, I shall look nearer home."

"I hope you are not thinking of me, Ran, because, if you are, I tell you frankly you have no chance," said Dora, with a mischievous look at her cousin.

"Why, what have I done to offend you, Dora? Or perhaps you do not think I would make you a good husband?"

"On the contrary, I think you would make the best in the world. You are as good as gold. That is just it; you are too good. The man I fall in love with—and unless I fall in love I shall not marry—must be just a little bit wicked—a dare-devil, dark-complexioned, piratical kind of a man, you know."

"What! have you been reading Byron?"

"How did you know? A little. His memory is greatly honoured in these parts. He and Rousseau together made the Lake Leman famous, they say; and there is a copy of his poems in almost every house—at any rate of 'Childe Harold' and the 'Prisoner of Chillon.' We have been reading them aloud, and the 'Corsair' and the 'Bride of Abydos.'"

"Well, it is not exactly the sort of reading I should choose for a young ladies' school," observed Randle.

"We don't use Byron's poems for lesson-books, you old

fogey; we read them, or rather such of them as mademoiselle allows—she is very strict, you know—amongst ourselves, when it rains, and that, and we cannot go out. But never mind Byron, tell me about the others.”

“What others?”

“Why, the Countess of Lindisfarne and the other daughters.”

“What shall I tell you about them?”

“How stupid you are, Ran! Or perhaps you had eyes for nobody but Lady Muriel. I only want to know how old they are, what they looked like, and how they were dressed.”

“Only! Good heavens, what an only! Well, I will do my best. Lady Lindisfarne is on the shady side of forty, but very well preserved, middle-sized, and rather stout, nose slightly hooked, eyes dark, hair ditto, and streaked with grey, full face, chin rather tending to double, complexion good, cheeks red, general expression masterful and decided, yet not ungenial.”

“And what had she on?”

“That you will have to guess, for if I might be shot this minute I could not tell you.”

“Did she wear a hat?”

“Yes, that I do remember, and a very ugly one it was—brim about a yard in circumference.”

“Well, she is not my ideal of a countess—she is more like a duchess.”

“Why?”

“I always picture countesses as being tall, shapely, and haughtily handsome; duchesses as stout, hook-nosed, arrogant, and double-chinned. Now tell me about Lady Maude.”

“Tall, plain-featured, sandy-haired, freckle-faced, and, as it seemed to me, rather proud and reserved.”

“Jealous of her sister, perhaps.”

“You absurd girl—what will you say next?”

“I am sure I don’t know.”

“I don’t think you do.”

“Yes, I do, though. What is the other like? there is another, is there not?”

“Yes, Lady Mary. Twelve years old, short-frocked, long-legged; and the child has a good face and pleasant ways. Anything else?”

“Yes. Are there no sons?”

“Two or three, I believe; but I may tell you at once that I know nothing about them. I heard just one mention of the boys, and I suppose the earl’s sons were the youngsters spoken of.”

“That reminds me. I was forgetting about the earl. What is he like?”

“A middle-aged gentleman of rather ungainly figure and

homely countenance. Not very clever, I fancy, and a good deal led by his wife; but very courtly in manner, and, I should think, very kind-hearted."

"Now, I think that is all," answered Dora, thoughtfully. "You will go to Avalon Priory, of course?"

"If they invite me, and I can find time."

"Find time! Of course you can, and if you cannot you must, if only that you may take notice what they wear and tell me afterwards."

"But you know I never do take notice what ladies wear," remonstrated Randle, rather alarmed at this suggestion; "or, if I do, I forget immediately afterwards. I could not possibly remember, Dora."

"That difficulty is easily got over," returned Dora, with one of her most mischievous glances, for she delighted in teasing her cousin. "You shall write every day and tell me everything; and then there will be no danger of your forgetting, you know. It will be so nice—almost as good as being at Avalon Priory oneself. You will now—won't you—like a dear, good old Ran?"

"I can try, you know," said Randle, dubiously, not feeling quite sure whether Dora was in jest or earnest; "but it will be time enough to think about that when I get my invitation. Who knows? It may never come."

"No fear of that. And now, tell me about your other adventure."

"What other adventure?"

"With that Russian you spoke about."

"It was no adventure. I merely said that I had made the acquaintance of a Russian revolutionist on the steamer. We exchanged cards; see, here is his."

"Ah, Sergius Kalongia. How do you know he is a revolutionist?"

"I gathered as much from his remarks, and then there was a spy following him."

"Oh, how romantic! Did the spy catch him?"

"Not exactly. He caught the spy."

"Perhaps he is a Nihilist," observed Dora, thoughtfully, when Randle had told her of the disaster that befell the spy at Vevey.

"Who—the spy?"

"Of course not. How can the spy be a Nihilist? This M. Kalongia, of course."

"It is possible. But really I don't know much about these Nihilists. What are they like?"

"Like! Why, they are the most dreadful people in the

world. Madame Vientemps says they are worse than Thugs or cannibals. They believe in nothing, and kill everybody they don't like."

"I hope Kalougia is not one of them, for I have invited him to Whitebrook."

"Oh, Ran, invite a Nihilist to Whitebrook! He will blow somebody up, or do something else equally dreadful."

"Nonsense! Kalougia talks rather wildly at times, it is true, but he is no Nihilist."

"I hope he is not, Ran, for all our sakes, if he goes to Whitebrook; but there are a great many of them about here. Is he very fierce-looking?"

"Quite the contrary, and very quiet and gentlemanly in manner; but I fancy he can be a good deal of a dare-devil if he likes. And, now I think of it, he has very dark eyes. Just a man after your own heart, I should think, Dora."

"Thank you, cousin. My ideas have certainly enlarged since I came to Switzerland, but one must draw the line somewhere and I draw it at Nihilists."

"But I tell you Kalougia is not a Nihilist."

"I am not at all sure about that, Randle. From your description, I rather think he is."

"If you are at home when he comes to Whitebrook, I will introduce him to you, and then you may judge for yourself," answered Randle, with a laugh.

"Thank you very much, Ran, but I don't want to be introduced to him. At any rate, you must have him searched first, to see that he has no dynamite or bomb-shells about him, and

"Here comes a young woman who wants to speak to you, I think, Dora."

The young woman proved to be a *bonne* (servant), who came to announce that Monsieur Ryvington's repast was served, and that Mademoiselle Vientemps awaited him in the dining-room.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER PARTING.

THE cousins, in obedience to the summons conveyed by the *bonne*, returned to the house, and, when they entered the dining-room, found Mademoiselle Vientemps at the head of the table, of which, on no consideration whatever, would she let anyone but herself do the honours.

"By taking your repast now, Monsieur Ryvington," she observed, "you will have time to walk leisurely to the station, whither Dora can accompany you and make her last adieux. Did you show your brother the Promenade des Marronniers, *mignonne*?"

"You, mistake, mademoiselle," said Dora, demurely. "Randle is not my brother—he is my cousin."

"*Quelle horreur!*" exclaimed the schoolmistress, falling back in her chair as if she were going to faint, her face expressive of the deepest dismay. "*Mais, mon Dieu*, mademoiselle, this is too much. Did you not tell me this gentleman was your brother; and you, monsieur, did you not say that Mademoiselle Ryvington was your sister?"

"Neither one nor the other, Mademoiselle Vientemps," said Dora, coolly. "He was announced as Mr. Randle Ryvington."

"Very well; Mr. Randle Ryvington is your brother, your only brother, as you have often told me."

"So he is, and my cousin too."

"Pray be serious, mademoiselle. This is an affair very grave, I assure you. Do not attempt any *calembours* or *mauvaises plaisanteries*—any ill-timed jokes—if you please. How can this gentleman be at the same time your brother and your cousin? You mock me; you amuse yourself at my expense, Mademoiselle Dora."

"I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle Vientemps; I did not say that he was."

"But, Mademoiselle Dora, what mean you? You will tell me next that I have no ears. Did I not this moment hear you say so?"

"I said that Randle Ryvington was my cousin, and I said that Randle Ryvington was my brother, and what I said was true."

"Excuse me, Mademoiselle Dora, that *cannot* be true—it is impossible—it is a thing unheard of. But I see how it is; you are making a little joke. He is all the time your brother. Are you not, Monsieur Ryvington?"

"I am her cousin, as she says," answered Randle, who thought the mystification had gone far enough. "Yet she is quite right. Her brother, my cousin, bears the same name as myself. She has, therefore, a brother Randle and a cousin Randle."

"Oh, *méchante*, to deceive me in such a fashion," said the schoolmistress, shaking her finger, but not unkindly, at Dora. "What would monsieur your father say if he knew? And it is not *convenable*—it is not *comme il faut*—what do you say?"

Proper! It is not proper for a young girl to take walks *tête-à-tête* with a young gentleman, though he is her cousin."

"Why, papa asked him to call, Mademoiselle Vientemps; and as for talking *tête-à-tête*, Randle and I have walked *tête-à-tête* hundreds of times. You must remember that we are English, and English girls are not *jeunes filles*."

"I daresay it is true," observed Mademoiselle Vientemps, thoughtfully. "It is certainly to me altogether incomprehensible; yet I have heard that such enormities are committed in England. Still, if I had known, Dora, you would not have walked out with your cousin alone. But you will promise me one thing, my cabbage—you will not let it be known that this gentleman is not your brother. The example would be frightful, it might demoralise the whole school. On this condition I think you may go with monsieur your cousin to the station to make your last adieux; but Julie must accompany you both there and back. We are not in England, remember. How young girls who are allowed such liberties can possibly turn out well is to me absolutely incomprehensible—absolutely incomprehensible. But the English always were a people apart, and I suppose their way of bringing up their children is only in keeping with the national character."

"We have no reason to be dissatisfied with the results, I think—at least, so far as our girls are concerned," said Randle, who was not at all disposed to admit the superiority of the French system of girl training, which Mademoiselle Vientemps seemed to take for granted; "I have not, it is true, seen much of continental young ladies; but I cannot admit that they are one whit better, or more modest, than our English maidens."

If Randle had not feared to give offence, he would have said that the maidens of England were in every way superior to the *jeunes filles* of France.

Dora rewarded him with an approving glance.

"It is very well of you, monsieur, to defend your country and your *compatriotes*; and it is only right that you should think highly of them; but you know our French proverb, *chacun à son goût*—everyone to his taste; and you must let an old woman retain her belief that the system under which she was brought up, and in which she tries to bring up the *jeunes filles* committed to her charge, is the best possible—except perhaps for English and American girls, who are like none other."

"I do not know if you intend that as a compliment, mademoiselle," answered Randle, "but I take it as one. You are right. English girls are like none other."

The repast over, Randle took leave of the schoolmistress, and Dora, followed by a servant, who, however, remained so far

in the rear that they were practically as much *en tête-à-tête* as before, went with her cousin to the station. They walked slowly, and Dora had ample time to point out, and Randle to admire, the beauties of Nyon—its superb situation, its trees, terraces, and gardens, its quaint houses and Gothic towers, and the unrivalled views which it commanded. The evening was calm. The blue wavelets of the lake broke noiselessly at the foot of the hill on which Nyon sits enthroned. Fishermen's boats, laden with lacustrine spoil, were returning slowly homewards; and a fleet of lateen-rigged barques, their wing-like sails belling lazily to the dying breeze, were bearing up for Yvoire and Geneva. The sun, now low in the west, had veiled his face behind a mass of trailing clouds which rose from the crest of Mont Reculet; and his mellowed rays shed on the green meadows and fragrant woods, the white villas and grey castles of the Savoyard shore, a golden glory, and illumined the wild desolation of the Pennine Alps and the eternal snows of Mont Blanc with a weird and ghostly splendour.

"There is nothing like this at Whitebrook, Dora," said Randle, softly. "Do you think you can live contentedly in Lancashire after being so long in Switzerland?"

"I shall regret Nyon often, no doubt. All my life long I shall think of it, and my stay here, with pleasure. But then you see, Ran, Lancashire is home, and Nyon is not. It might become so, though—any place might."

"How, Dora?"

"Home is wherever the heart and affections are."

"And yours?"

"Are going with you to Whitebrook, Ran."

"Where you will soon follow them," answered Randle, carelessly; for he saw in his cousin's remarks nothing more than a confession of girlish home-sickness, albeit the time came when they appeared to him in another light, and he saw in her words a deeper meaning. "You are not alone in wanting something you do not possess. It is a very common complaint. When we are at home we want to be abroad, and when we are abroad we want to be at home. I only wish I could stay all the summer in Switzerland."

"Why don't you, then?"

"What would become of the concern, I should like to know, if I were to stay away all summer? Since my father died the whole weight of it has rested on my shoulder—before he died, I might say, for he was ill several months. This is the first holiday I have taken since, and I feel that I have already been away too long."

"There is Bob."

"So there is, and he does not do amiss; but he is little more than a lad yet, remember."

"That means, I suppose, that he is not much of a help to you."

"Not much, though I manage him better than my father did, I fancy. He is a bit wild and harum-scarum at times, and my father was afraid of trusting him, and did not give him much to do. That was a mistake. I act quite differently. I tell him a thing must be done, and make him responsible for the doing. Then he works and pays attention. When Bob is a little older, I think he will do very well. In fact, if he had not been shap- ing well of late, I could not have taken so long a holiday. But father and he never pulled very well together. I think Bob's occasional wildness rather frightened him. You know how very strict and old-fashioned in his ways and ideas my father used to be."

"Bob and he were antipathetic, I suppose," suggested Dora.

"They did not understand each other, and when people do not understand each other they are apt to get on badly. At least, that is what I was reading in a book."

"The book is right, Dora. I daresay that is why your brother and I do not always get on very well together—we are antipathetic."

"Then you and I must be sympathetic, Ran, for we always get on very well together," observed Dora, with the gravity becoming the discussion of a somewhat metaphysical subject.

"Exactly. And you and Bob always got on well together, I think."

"Always. I like Bob. Does not he come of age next year?"

"Yes, early in June—the 5th, I think."

"I shall be at home then. What are you going to do?"

"By way of keeping it up, you mean?"

"Yes. You will have to give a dance, of course, and a treat to the hands."

"Really, I have hardly given the matter a thought yet. I don't know about the dance; I am not sure that my mother would like it. The hands must, of course, have a treat. We shall see when the time comes. In any case we will not decide till you get back. I suppose you would like to have a finger in the pie?"

"You must give a dance or something, and I should certainly like to have a finger in that pie; and I will make papa or Randle fetch me in May, so that I may be at home in good time. But here we are at the station. Don't you think you had better take your ticket?"

"Decidedly, and register my belongings, which I ordered to be sent here from the landing-stage, if you will kindly excuse me a moment."

Randle had hardly taken his ticket, watched the rather tedious operation of weighing his luggage, and obtained the voucher for it, when the whistle of the train was heard.

Three minutes later he was gone, and Dora was returning wistfully towards Villa Artemisia.

The *bonne* who formed Dora's escort, when talking next day with her fellow-servants, told how very fond Mademoiselle Ryvington was of her brother. She made her adieux without shedding a tear; but when the train was out of sight, and she no more waved her handkerchief, "my faith, how she wept!" said the girl, "and she had such a headache afterwards that she could not come down to supper, and spent the rest of the evening all alone in her room."

As for Randle, he sped towards Lausanne (if travelling by a Swiss train can be called speeding), whence he intended to proceed, *viâ* Pontarlier, to Paris, thinking sometimes of his business, sometimes of the girls he had left behind him. Though he had been greatly struck by Lady Muriel Avalon, he did not feel as if he had lost his heart to her; and he had so long looked on Dora as a girl, that it did not occur to him she might have begun to feel and think as a woman.

CHAPTER XII.

AN OLD-FASHIONED FIRM.

A LONG, straggling, loose-jointed, monotonous manufacturing town in Mid-Lancashire—a multitude of chimneys, "tall as masts of some high admiral," tossing their smoke in the sombre air—a wilderness of streets and lanes, running in all directions until they are lost, miles away, in brick-fields and waste places. The streets, for the most part, except about the central square and the outskirts, are passages between gaunt and gloomy factories, foundries, machine-shops, and mean-looking cottages. Here and there is a sooty church, save for its stumpy steeple, hardly distinguishable from a warehouse, or slab-sided chapel of depressing aspect. Near the middle of the town is a space free from long chimneys, and occupied by the town-hall, market-place, banks, and other buildings, which, if they were a little less dingy, might be deemed almost handsome. On the rising

ground towards the north are clusters of comely villas, surrounded by gardens and embowered in trees; and, beyond the chimneys and the smoke, the outlook is as picturesque and attractive as the town itself is ugly and repellent. Yet, unlovely as Whitebrook undoubtedly is, something may be urged in its behalf—it might be worse. There are places still less lovely. It is not, for instance, quite as dismal as Heywood, which has been aptly likened to a petrified funeral procession; nor as hideous as Wigan, which could hardly be blacker if it had been quarried from its own coal measures; nor as gloomy as Bolton, whose dingy buildings and cindered roads might well suggest the idea that the town is sorrowing for its sins in soot and ashes. And though the air of Whitebrook cannot truthfully be described as balmy, nor as reminding him who breathes it of Araby the Blest, it will compare favourably with that of a large town in another part of the county, where, in a dry summer, the manufacturers are wont to fill their boilers and draw their supplies of condensing water from the main sewer.

Whitebrookers of this generation might also urge in extenuation of judgment that the town is pretty much as they found it, and that by far the greater part of it was in existence long before the æsthetic idea came into vogue, or sanitary science into being. They are, moreover, making creditable efforts to repair the faults of their forefathers, and the town is visibly, if very slowly, emerging from the condition of unredeemed ugliness in which it was so long content to abide.

The working people of Whitebrook are a sturdy, independent, and industrious race, somewhat lacking, perhaps, in sweetness and light, and too much given to quarrelling over their cups and punching each other's heads, but thoroughly in earnest, gifted with considerable shrewdness, and possessed of a rich store of mother wit. The masters are of all sorts, from the overlooker just starting for himself, who lives like one of his own hands, and makes his lads work harder than hired servants, to the cotton lord who counts his looms by the thousand, and his spindles by the hundred thousand, educates his sons at Oxford, and his daughters at Paris, drops his *h's*, and aspires to Parliamentary honours.

The Ryvingtons, though they were supposed to have some connection with Rvington Pike, had long flourished in Whitebrook. The first of them, according to the family tradition, settled in the town about the middle of the last century, when it was little more than a large village of timbered houses, clustering round the parish church in a green and shady valley, through which meandered the White Brook, the stream whence the place derives its name, at that time clear, if not white (some

local archæologists hold that "white," in this case, is a corruption of "wide"), and not, as now, of the consistency of porridge, and the colour of ink.

The first of the Whitebrook Ryvingtons was not supposed by his neighbours to have any ancestors to speak of, and he died in ignorance of the fact, discovered in a later age by one of his descendants, that his name was among the most illustrious in the North of England, and his house remotely akin to the royal race of Barbarossa. Seeing, however, that he was a hard-working draper in a small way of business, whose chief concern was to make both ends meet and bring up his family creditably, it may be questioned if the knowledge would have afforded him much satisfaction. A little legacy or a large order would have been more to the purpose. His son Randle, who succeeded him in the shop, was a shrewd and prosperous tradesman, who conceived the happy idea of himself manufacturing some of the goods in which he dealt. So he bought him yarn and gave it out to weave, manufacturing in those halcyon days being open to anybody who could hire a weaver or two and find a few cops and warps. Some of the pieces which he produced he sold in the grey, and acquired considerable local celebrity for the excellent quality of his bumps and sheetings; others he got bleached, and sold as shirtings or stuff for shifts. As his business increased he opened up a connection in Manchester, took his sons into partnership, and when he died, left his firm in good credit, and his family in easy circumstances.

His descendants honoured the memory of their ancestor by making Randle a family name, and perpetuating the designation of Randle Ryvington and Sons, which he had bestowed upon the firm, a designation that, after the lapse of a hundred years, it still retains.

This Randle—Randle the first, he may be called—and the two sons that succeeded him, just and God-fearing men all of them, gave the house a character and a tone which it never lost. Their influence, as does that of most of us, either for good or for evil, lived after them. In disposition they were prudent and cautious, in their dealings honourable and straightforward. They were slow in adopting new inventions, deliberate in making changes, and looked with distrust on new-fangled ways. They clung to hand looms long after some of their neighbours were making fortunes by power looms; and adopted the innovation only when they saw it was an assured success. They were equally backward in substituting self-actors for hand mules, loose reeds for fast reeds, and two picking sticks for one. They never increased their business or put up a new building until the money was ready beforehand. They had always a balance at their bankers,

and would rather have perished than have had anybody "astride of the ridging" of house or factory.

"We should feel as if th' place was not our own if we parted with th' writings," said a member of the firm one day to a neighbour who was talking about mortgaging his mill. "I'd liefer sell it out and out, and be a tenant, than go on in th' name of owning a property as somebody could sell o'er my head."

This was not the way to make a large fortune or build up a big business; and considering, further, that the Ryvingtons always divided their substance fairly among their children, making no difference between sons and daughters, it is not surprising that the "concern," as they always called it, did not equal in magnitude some establishments of much later growth, nor that, after several generations, they were rather well-to-do than wealthy.

But they had their compensations. They were free from the greatest of troubles that can beset a business man—shortness of money. Even in the worst of times their credit was never questioned, nor their power of keeping their mills going and their people employed impaired. "Ryvingtons" never either stopped or ran short time; and as they had no need to "grind" their hands, always paid full wages, and used good cotton, they had rarely a turn-out. Their honesty was proverbial. They gave so full weight and measure, and were so correct in their accounts withal, that even the keenest buyers accepted their invoices without examination. They never tried to pass off faulty pieces as perfect. Goods in respect of which abatements had been made from the weaver's wages were kept scrupulously apart and sold as "rejects." It was sometimes said that Ryvingtons' "bates," as faulty goods are occasionally called, were better than some people's "regulars." They paid their accounts to the day, and with those who did not treat them in like manner they would have nothing to do. It was a rigid rule of the concern to close the account of any buyer who, either by unpunctual payments or any other lapse, showed that he was not careful to keep his engagements; and, albeit by thus acting they lost a few good customers, they escaped bad debts and saved themselves an infinitude of worry.

It is hardly necessary to say that Ryvington and Sons had never anything to do with bills. They regarded them as an invention of the devil. Even when they imported cotton, which shippers invariably draw against at a usance of a certain number of days or months, the concern always took up the drafts under discount.

It is almost superfluous to say that a family firm so old-fashioned in their ways and ideas were orthodox in religion and

conservative in politics. They were faithful, if not very ardent, supporters of the Church as by law established; and though they did not mix themselves up much in local matters, having generally other fish to fry, they always thought it their duty, when Whitebrook was contested, to place their vote and interest at the disposal of the Tory candidates.

As befitted their antiquity, there being no other family in the borough that could boast of so long a pedigree, the Ryvingtons were somewhat reserved in their manner and exclusive in their choice of associates, holding themselves studiously aloof from new comers and upstarts. They made an exception, however, in favour of those of their old hands who had set up for themselves and seemed to be getting on. These they graciously patronised, and sometimes substantially helped.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REDSCAR RYVINGTONS.

THE home of the Ryvingtons, though technically within the borough of Whitebrook, was some distance from the town proper. At the time of the first Reform Bill the parliamentary boundaries of the borough had been considerably broadened, and made to include a wide extent of open country. Redscar, as the place was called, lay in a little valley at the very extremity of the boundary. It was shut off from the town and sheltered from its smoke by an intervening wood-crowned hill. The situation had been chosen by the first Randle for its water privileges and other advantages, including proximity to a canal which, reaching as far as Wigan and Liverpool, formed, before the advent of railways, a medium for the supplies of cotton and coal of inestimable value.

It goes without saying that the mills were near the canal. They formed a grotesque and rather confused mass of buildings—from the four-storeyed, narrow-windowed, ivy-mantled, weather-worn little factory, nearly a hundred years old, now used as a warehouse, to a modern loom shed with a glass roof, and a stately, six-storeyed, fireproof mill with a flat one, and windows evidently designed to justify the final cause of windows and give the utmost possible amount of light. But the wonder and triumph of Redscar was a most remarkable chimney, in shape and appearance rather resembling an Italian campanile than a Lancashire "liver," a chimney, strange to say, that never smoked. Careful observers averred that they could occasionally discern

a cloud-like something hovering about the top of it; but even the most censorious admitted that this appearance was more like condensing steam than factory smoke, and that if all the chimneys in Whitebrook were fitted up on the same principle it would effect an immense improvement in its aspect, and probably an important saving in the consumption of coal.

At right angles to the mills were two long rows of cottages, as old-fashioned, some of them, as the factory of the first Randle, yet by no means bad dwellings, since, having been built with "shops" for the reception of hand looms, they were more roomy than many modern erections of the same class. The style of the majority of them, however, was of a later age, and a new row was in course of building so superior to the rest that they promised, when finished, to fulfil the boast of their designer, and be a comfort to look at and a pleasure to live in.

On the brow of the wooded hill which I have mentioned as cutting off Redscar from Whitebrook were two houses, about half a mile apart, embowered in trees, surrounded by gardens, and approached by winding, grass-bordered avenues. They were square, substantial structures of grey sandstone, and, though sufficiently well-looking, had evidently been planned rather with a view to comfort and solidity than to outward appearance.

One of them was called Redscar Hall; the other bore the name of Redscar House. In the former, some years prior to the opening of our story, had lived Randle Ryvington, uncle of the Randle whose acquaintance the reader has already made, and Dora's father. In Redscar House lived the younger Randle, better known in the neighbourhood as Red Randle and Red Ryvington, and his brother Robert, generally spoken of as Bob, to distinguish him from his father, whose name was also Robert. This Robert had died the year before Randle's visit to Switzerland, shortly after taking his elder son into partnership, and some ten years after the elder Randle had dissolved his connection with the firm of Ryvington and Sons, and left Redscar Hall for Deepdene Park, a place on the other side of Whitebrook. As Randle senior had also a son Randle, the male members of the Ryvington family consisted at that time of three Randles and two Roberts, a state of things which naturally led to one of the families being distinguished as the Redscar and the other as Deepdene Ryvingtons. By a natural transition these designations were shortened respectively to "Red" and "Deep"; and the cousins Randle, who were almost exactly of the same age, and so like each other as often to be mistaken for twins, became *par excellence* "Deep Ryvington" and "Red Ryvington," while their fathers were invariably spoken of as "Mr. Ryvington" and "Mr. Robert." In this respect they were exceptionally fortunate, nearly every

other manufacturer in the neighbourhood being dubbed with some post-baptismal name, often more expressive than flattering.

Robert Ryvington had devoted himself nearly all his life long to the concern, to which he considered it to be one of the greatest of earthly privileges to belong. He loved it as a sailor loves his ship, an officer his regiment, a squire of old family his hereditary estate. He looked upon it as something apart from himself, as having an almost sacred character. He placed its interest above his own personal interest, or that of any other person. "The concern must not suffer," was his final and invariable answer to every proposal which seemed adverse to its welfare. It was a joke among his neighbours that when Mr. Robert died he would take the latest balance-sheet with him to show to his father in the other world.

When his brother Randle first proposed to retire from the concern, Robert could hardly believe his own ears. It was the first time in the history of the concern that any Ryvington had wished to sever his connection therewith; and the state of mind which could make such a consummation seem desirable was simply incomprehensible to him. Although his brother's retirement would leave him sole proprietor of the concern, he tried hard to turn him from his purpose; but Randle had made up his mind, and their partnership was dissolved—in some measure also their friendship, for they were never the same to each other again, and Robert marked his sense of his brother's lack of loyalty to the concern by erasing his name as executor from his will. Shortly before his death, however, he repented him of this resolve, and re-nominated Randle as one of his trustees.

Two years after Randle's retirement, Robert's elder son, then about eighteen, finished his education, and began to learn his duties as a future member of the concern. As the lad was sharp, and had a bent for science, his father, after he left the Whitebrook Grammar School, sent him for two years to Glasgow, where he studied mechanics and chemistry under two celebrated professors of those branches of knowledge.

The day his son was of age Robert made him a partner, an arrangement that gave the old gentleman unspeakable satisfaction; for the thought that in the event of his death the concern would be left to manage itself, and might, in such a dire contingency, even cease to exist, had long caused him mortal anxiety. From this fear he was now relieved, and, as Randle had already proved himself an able coadjutor and an excellent man of business, his father felt that, with a little more experience, the lad might be trusted to bear the burden alone should the need arise. The need did arise. A few years later Robert slept his last sleep in

the family vault in the parish churchyard. When he knew his end was approaching he called his son to him.

"You are young to be left with such a weight on your shoulders, my dear lad," he said. "I would I might have been spared a few years longer; but God's will be done! Be cautious; don't stretch your arm farther than the coat sleeve will reach. You are sharp enough—I have no fear about that, but young folks are sometimes apt to be a bit too venturesome. Be a father as well as a brother to Bob; he's not like you, he'll want looking after. I need not tell you to be good to your mother, you always have been; you have been good to us both. Nobody could wish for a better son. God in Heaven bless you, my lad! Do your duty; stick to the concern."

"I will try, father," said Randle, struggling with his tears. "And, God helping me, I will do my duty by the concern, as you have done yours."

He gave the promise freely, though he would rather his father's thoughts at this supreme moment had not been so entirely taken up with worldly affairs.

"I know you will; good lad, good lad. Now I shall die easy. I know the concern in your hands will be safe. It makes me feel better; may be I shall pull through after all."

The day after this conversation Robert Ryvington died. His last words were, "Duty—concern—Randle."

He appointed as his executors Sophia, his wife, Randle, his brother, Randle, his son, and Leonard Pleasington, of Whitebrook, his trusty friend and legal adviser. His second son, then about twenty, was to have the option, two years later—of which there could be little question that he would avail himself—of entering the concern as partner, if Randle should at that time be of opinion that his brother could fill the position with credit to himself and advantage to the business.

Among other provisions of the will was one to the effect that on each of the testator's sons and his wife should be settled a sum of ten thousand pounds, so that, as Robert, when he was explaining his intentions in this regard to his lawyer, observed, there would always be bread and cheese for them, whatever happened. As, however, Randle did not think that so large a sum could at once be spared from the working capital of the concern—seeing that they had lately built a new loom shed and spent a good lot of money on machinery and other improvements—it was agreed that the amount in question should form a first charge on the Redscar estate. When this expedient was first proposed, Randle objected that it was against a long-standing rule of the concern to borrow money, either on mortgage or in any other way. To this objection Mr. Pleasington

replied that the transaction would involve neither borrowing nor payment, and that the property would be just as much the property of the family as previously; whereupon Randle yielded the point and the arrangement as proposed was carried out.

The year following his father's death, Randle, who besides bearing almost alone the burden of a large business—for Bob had not long left school, and was not yet of much use to him—had been compelled to undertake many extraneous matters arising out of the winding-up of his father's affairs, and was beginning to suffer somewhat in health, made a trip to Switzerland, in the course of which, as the reader is aware, he formed the acquaintance of Lord Lindisfarne and his family, and of Sergius Kalongia

CHAPTER XIV.

IN MOSLEY STREET.

THREE days after quitting Switzerland, Dora, and Lady Muriel, Randle was in the midst of murky Manchester. The change was startling. It could hardly have been more so if he had gone to bed in fairy-land and got up in pandemonium. Instead of snow-white peaks, vaulted over with cerulean skies, were black-throated chimneys overhung with smoky clouds. The arrowy Rhone was replaced by the inky Irwell, the pathless pine-woods by crowded streets, the blue expanse of Lake Lemman by a babel of sooty buildings. Randle, as he walked down Mosley Street towards Ryvington and Sons' warehouse, breathed a sigh of regret; for, man of business and devoted to duty though he was, he had a strain of romance in his character, and glancing at the sights around him, and mentally comparing them with the scenes he had so lately quitted, he thought, if the alternative had been open to him, he would willingly have exchanged Lancashire and his present lot for some

“ Fair clime where every season smiles
Benignant o'er those blessed isles,”

and, perchance, a companion equally fair and benignant. But the atmosphere and associations of Mosley Street are not altogether propitious for “winged wanderings of the fancy;” and when Randle reached the door of his warehouse he was roused to the reality of things by the sight of a load of shirtings fresh from Redscar; while the grasp of old Oates's hand, and

the sound of his cheery voice, completed the shattering of his day-dream, and banished from his mind—for the moment at least—the last vagrant yearnings for a mountain land and an angelic face.

“Glad to see you back, Mr. Randle; glad to see you back. Your trip seems to have done you a power of good. Why, you are as brown as a bit of old mahogany. I hope you liked Switzerland, sir. A fine country, they tell me. Don’t you feel as if you were a ticket-of-leave man going back to penal servitude? I always do when I come back to Manchester after my holiday at the sea-side.”

Oates was the salesman, a dapper little fellow with big eyes, so very wide open as to suggest that the owner’s mental condition was one of chronic astonishment. Though everybody called him Old Oates, and he had been a long time in the service of the concern—for which he had an immense respect—he was not a very old man, and, despite his sixty years, “sound in wind, limb, and eyesight,” as he often took occasion to observe.

“Well, it is rather a trial, buckling to after a pleasant holiday, which you would gladly have made longer if you could. But life is not all beer and skittles, you know. We must not put pleasure before business. And how have you been this long time, Oates?”

“Salubrious, Mr. Randle; salubrious. Never better in my life, as I know of—sound in wind, limb, and eyesight; and there isn’t many men of my age can say that. And what is more, I’ll back myself to run up a flight of steps with anybody in Manchester ten years younger; or anybody else, weight for age. Ah, ah, ah!”

The capability of physical exertion denoted by Mr. Oates’s last observation was one of considerable importance to a person in his position, for a Manchester salesman passes about half his working life in getting up stairs, and a failure of leg power, or a tendency to broken-windedness, would be almost as fatal to his usefulness as to that of a racehorse in training or a foot soldier in war time.

“I am glad you keep so well and hearty, Oates. Why, you are as fresh as when you first came to us, and that is—let me see—how long since?”

“Eight and twenty years come next September. I entered the service of the concern the year your father was married—that was before you were born, and I hope I shall live to see you married also, Mr. Randle.”

“Thank you for the information,” said Randle, with a laugh; “and now about business. How have things gone on while I have been away?”

"Very well, Mr. Randle. Nothing special has happened, at least not at this end, and I have not heard of anything at the works. Deliveries are all in order; everything up to time."

"Sold anything?"

"Very little—for the time, I mean—perhaps 20,000 pieces of one sort and another. I took an order yesterday from Madder and Mordaunt for 3,000 railways at seven and six."

By "railways" Mr. Oates meant a description of cloth on which that name had been conferred to signify the extreme rapidity with which, owing to their lightness of texture, they were woven.

"But is not that rather a low price?" asked Randle. "The last price we got, if I remember rightly, was seven and nine."

"So it is, but the market has been as flat as ditch water—all the time you have been away, I think. But we are not badly off. We have orders on the books that will keep us going for a fortnight or more; and there was decidedly a better feeling on 'Change yesterday afternoon. There is more doing at Calcutta, I am told, and Wild and Savage sent over an hour ago to ask for quotations; and that's a good sign. They know the time o' day, Wild and Savage do. But they won't catch old Oates napping, let 'em get up as early as they like."

"You did not quote, I suppose?"

"Not exactly. I said I'd slip across in the course of the morning. I don't mean to name a price to anybody until I know what the feeling is here, and what is being done in Liverpool. When Wild and Savage want a quotation early in a morning, I says to myself, 'Keep your weather eye open, Oates,' says I. It is not easy to catch an old bird with chaff, Mr. Randle."

"Not an old bird like you, Oates, I'm sure. I shall leave everything to you to-day, for I am so completely out of the swim that if I were to meddle I should muddle. Will my brother be here to-day, do you suppose?"

"I believe so. He was here on Friday, and said he should very likely run up to-day to see what was going on. A smart young man Mr. Robert, sir. With a little more experience he'll make a capital man of business. He knows what he's about, he does."

"Yes; Bob is no fool. I think sometimes he is even too sharp—too sharp and sanguine. His ideas are very large."

"Why, yes, they are, just a little. It is a fault of young people, being very hopeful, and believing they know better than anybody else. And it's maybe as well as it is so, or else what would become of 'em when they get older, poor things, and found what a terribly disappointing world it is? Depend upon it, Mr. Randle, a hopeful disposition is a wonderful help to a

man in the battle of life. As for Mr. Robert, you have only to keep a tight hand on him, and he'll do first-rate. But here is Blezzard coming down the steps. He was here on Friday, inquiring when you'd be back, very anxious; and as he would not say what his business was, neither to me nor Mr. Robert, I expect it is something private. I think I'll just see how many pieces have come up this morning. Wild and Savage are very pressing for the completion of their order for madapollams."

Ryvington and Sons' warehouse was a large cellar, divided into a room for the reception of pieces, and two small offices. Their standing and the extent of their business would have fully warranted the firm having a more imposing place; but they had been tenants of this particular cellar upwards of thirty years; and, as a rule, the concern was very conservative, especially as touching outlay or changes, the influence of which on future stocktakings was problematical or remote.

"If you will undertake to get a halfpenny a piece more on our production the year round," said Mr. Robert Ryvington one day to Oates, when the latter was urging him to take a large first-floor warehouse in Portland Street, "we will flit to-morrow."

The salesman, notwithstanding the soundness of his wind, limbs, and eyesight, and his unequalled capacity for getting up stairs, being unable to accept this condition, the lease of the cellar was renewed for a further term of fourteen years.

"Well, Blezzard," said Randle, as the individual whom Oates had seen descending the steps entered the office, "you wanted to see me, I hear; what can I do for you to-day?"

"It is gradely warm to-day," rejoined Blezzard, taking a big blue pocket-handkerchief from the crown of his hat and mopping his face therewith—a pleasant, clean-cut face, with plenty of colour, which, however, it did not owe to drink, the man being a teetotaller. "Wor it as warm wheer yo've bin, Mr. Frank?"

"Warmer, a good deal."

"Bith, mon, yo' wornt frozen, then? Do yo' want a hoss, thinken yo', Mr. Frank—a gradely good un, rising seven, saand as a bell, and 'ansom as paint; just suit yo' or Mr. Robbut, to ride a-hunting."

"I have not time to go a-hunting, Blezzard, and Robert has a hunter; if he had another, he would be hunting too much, I am afraid."

"Well, could yo' do wi' a cart hoss, then? That grey mare as goes in th' shafts—Patty, durn'd they call her?—is getting too stiff for yo're wark. I've getten one as would just do for yo', same colour, too, but a hoss—you never seed such legs and

such a barril i' your life. Stan's sixteen hon's and a hoof; as strong as a helephant and draws like a devil. What sayen yo', Mr. Frank?"

"I don't know, Blezzard. I think the grey mare will do yet awhile. When I make up my mind to part with her, I'll let you know."

"Are yo' wantin' ought i'th shuttle or bobbin way, thinken yo'?" We are gradely weel fit up now for tornin' em out fast, and I can put 'em in chep."

"You know we always give orders for these things at the works, Blezzard. I'll inquire how we stand when we get back, and you can call on Friday. Is that all?" added Randle, with a shade of impatience in his voice; for he was growing rather weary of the man's importunity.

"Nay, not quite. I wanted to speak to yo' about summut else," said Blezzard, as he again vigorously applied the pocket-handkerchief to his face, which, without apparent cause—for the cellar was cool enough—was now perspiring more profusely than ever.

"Well, what is it, Blezzard?"

"About that theer account as is due next Friday. I wanted to ax yo' to let it stan' o'er till next month end."

"What is it for, and how much?"

"Them twothry skips o' yarn; they comin' to welly [nearly] a hundred pounds—£98 15s. 6d. after the discount's taken off."

"Well, you know our rule, Blezzard. When people don't keep faith with us—that is, when they don't pay according to agreement—we have nothing more to do with 'em."

"That is hard law, Mr. Frank."

"Law always is hard to those who break it. You must pay the account when it is due, Blezzard, or take the consequences. I should make the same answer to the best house in Manchester, even if I knew they had a million at their bankers."

Blezzard wiped his forehead more furiously than ever. He was an old Redscar overlooker, and had known Randle from a lad. Some years previously he had given up his situation, and started for himself as a sort of Jack-of-all-trades. He was partner in a small weaving concern, ran a bobbin mill and a saw-mill, made glue, pickers, and soap, dealt in horses, and traded in timber. A spirit of enterprise, however laudable in itself, is apt to land a man in pecuniary difficulties. This was Blezzard's position on the present occasion. He was desperately hard up. The request he had made of Randle he would never have dreamt of preferring to Randle's father; but he had counted—as it seemed without warrant—on the son being more complaisant. If he could have persuaded him to buy the hunter or the cart

horse, the amount to be paid on the following Friday would have been materially reduced, so that Randle's refusal to trade was a great disappointment.

"Well," he said, after a long pause and another application of the handkerchief, "I mun see if I cannot scrape it together. This is Tuesday; I've three days afore me; I can happen manage it. I suppose if I bring yo' th' brass i' good time o' Saturday morning that'll do?"

"No, Blezzard, it must be Friday—as late as ever you like, but Friday."

"Well, yo' are hard, Mr. Randle, and me as tackled [overlooked] five and twenty year for yo're father and yo're gron-father, and wor a weyver at Redscar factory afore yo' were born! Good day to yo', Mr. Randle."

"Wait a moment," said Randle, as Blezzard turned to go, "I am, perhaps, not as hard as you think. How is your business, or, I should rather say, how are your businesses going on—are you all right?"

"Yo' mean, con I pay twenty shillings t'pound, I reckon?" Randle nodded.

"Ay, con I, and have as much left as will keep our Mary and me i' porridge as long as we live. And what is moor, I shall have plenty of brass comin' round in a month's time—enough to pay everybody."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do for you. The concern must be paid. I can have no parley about that. But I'll lend you £200—give you a cheque on my own private account, I mean. Half that will, of course, go to pay your debt to the concern; the other half you can use until your money comes round—say until the end of next month."

"That's gradely good on yo', Mr. Randle," said Blezzard, shoving the blue pocket-handkerchief into the crown of his hat, for a sunny smile was drying up the perspiration that bedewed his face. "If ever I can do yo' a good turn for this kindness, I will."

The cheque was written out and Jack Blezzard left the warehouse with a light heart. He took the steps two at a time, and went at such a rate that he nearly overturned a young man who was leisurely descending them, whom in his hurry he had not perceived.

"Hulloa! By Jingo, you nearly knocked me down," exclaimed the young man. "Why, it's Jack Blezzard. You have got your seven-leagued boots on this morning, I think, Jack. But I would not advise to go at such a bat up Mosley Street. If you do the police will be taking you up for overdriving, or on suspicion of being an escaped lunatic."

"I ax your pardon, Mr. Robbut. I did not see you."

"It's a good job I saw you. If I had not you would have knocked me into the middle of next week. Has my brother turned up this morning, do you know?"

"Ay, yo'll find him theer i' th' office."

"All right. Good morning, Jack; and, I say, the next time you feel inclined to try how fast you can get upstairs, just see that the way is clear before you start."

"Well, I will, Mr. Robbut; I promise yo' that. It wouldn't do to knock yo' into th' middle o' next week; yo'd happen be stopping theer. I went so fast because I wor so fain; if yo'll ax yo're brother he'll happen tell you why. Good day."

Whereupon Blezzard turned into Mosley Street, while Robert Ryvington completed his descent of the steps, and, after exchanging greetings with Oates, entered the little glass partitioned inner office, where his brother was looking over a list of the orders that had been taken in his absence.

"Hulloa, Bob, is that you?" said Randle, looking up. "How are you, old fellow?"

"Tip-top. And you—but I need not ask—your face is the colour of a piece of ancient oak. Enjoyed yourself?"

"Very much. I have had a most delightful trip. You must have a run on the Continent one of these days, Bob."

"I shall be delighted, I am sure. You could not name a day for the start, could you, Ran? I am ready."

"Not at this moment, I am afraid. We will see later. How is the mother?"

"Very well in body, but rather uneasy in mind."

"What about?"

"Her son Randle. When she heard you were on the Alps, she was afraid you might be tumbling down a precipice, or getting yourself smothered by an avalanche. But her latest fear—I might say her present (for we were not sure on what day you would be back)—was that you might be lost in crossing the Channel."

"Poor mother! she is too anxious."

"Well, if there had not been you to fidget about there would probably have been some other source of anxiety for her," rejoined Bob, with a reflective air. "A certain amount of misery seems necessary to mother's happiness."

"How have you gone on at the works? All right?"

"Could not have gone on better, Ran, if you had been there yourself. For that matter you might have taken another month. You have not been missed in the least."

"That is because of your excellent management, I suppose," said Randle, who had made such complete arrangements before

his departure that it was hardly possible for things to have gone otherwise than smoothly during his absence.

"Well, I think my management has had something to do with it. By-the-by, I bagged Robin o' Kits the other day."

"What for? Robin is a very good weaver, and has been with us a long time."

"He cheeked me, and I could not stand that, you know."

"I thought Robin had more sense. I have always found him very respectful. What did he say to you, Bob?"

"He did not say it exactly to me," rejoined Bob, reddening, "but I heard him, and that is the same thing, you know."

"But what did he say?"

"Well, there was a lot of them—a lot of the hands, I mean—going up New Factory Lane, and I was close behind them, but they did not see me, and they were talking" (here Bob reddened a second time) "about my—about my moustache."

"Indeed," observed Randle, gravely, though with the least suspicion of a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth. "And what did they say?"

"One of them was saying that young Robbut seemed to have a good conceit of that top lip of his. 'Top lip be hanged,' said Robin; 'if our Betty couldn't grow a better moustache than young Bob's I'd give her a good hiding.' That made me rather mad, as you may suppose, Ran, so I just stepped up and asked him if he thought that was a right way to speak of his employer, and what do you think?—he had actually the impudence to maintain that they were not talking about me at all, and that the Bob he meant was bandy-legged Bob—the self-actor minder in number five, you know! That was more than I could stand, so I told him to go about his business, for a cheeky young rascal."

"And you think he did mean you?"

"Think! I am sure. Why bandy-legged Bob has no more moustache than a new-born baby."

"Still, I don't think Robin o' Kits meant to be disrespectful; he did not know you were within earshot, and you remember the proverb, 'Listeners never hear any good of themselves!' When he found you had heard him, he tried to get out of the scrape the best way he could. If he asks to come back, as I daresay he will, I think you had better give him a talking to, and take him on again."

"Well, if you think so, Ran, I will. But I'll give him a good blowing up first," said Bob, with a fierce pull at his fluffy moustaches, of which, being all the hair he had on his face, or was likely to have, he was excusably proud, and submitted them to frequent caressings and strokings. For the rest, Bob

Ryvington was a tall, well-proportioned lad, with an intelligent eager face, and keen grey eyes. His hair was light, his complexion blonde, and his nose *retroussé*. He wore his hat rather on one side, which gave him a rakish air that was foreign to his disposition, dandyism not being one of his foibles. The habit was involuntary, due, not to deliberate intention, but to physical peculiarity; for his skull, being slightly lobsided, he could not, do as he would, prevent his hat from tilting a little towards his left ear. This difficulty, and his extremely youthful appearance, owing to the almost nakedness of his face, were for the present Bob's greatest troubles.

"Have you had occasion to draw anything out of the bank?" asked Randle.

"I have not drawn a single cheque. There has been nothing to pay but wages and some small accounts since you went away, which have been more than covered by moneys received. The bank balance has improved by as many thousands the last two or three weeks."

After some further conversation on divers topics, and a conference with Oates, on the all-important question of prices and sales, all three left the warehouse on various errands relating to the business of the concern.

CHAPTER XV.

RED RANDLE AT HOME.

THE compartment in which Randle and his brother travelled to Whitebrook was filled with manufacturers. It was market day, and there was probably not a person in the train that did not own allegiance to King Cotton. As was natural in the circumstances, a good deal of shop was talked.

"Done any business to-day, Ryvington?" asked a portly, pompous gentleman, with a red face, and a white waistcoat, who seemed gifted with great fluency of speech, for he talked as much as all the rest of his companions put together. He was the active partner in the firm of Oliver Tugwood and Co. His brother was one of the borough members. Their father, in days gone by, had kept the 'Nag's Head,' in Leather Lane, a circumstance which the people of Whitebrook strove to keep in remembrance by calling the Tugwood Mills 'Pinchnoggin.'

"A little," answered Randle; "about 15,000 pieces, I think, of one sort and another."

"Shirtings?"

"Some of them—about half, I fancy."

"What did you get for eight and a quarters, if it's a fair question?" asked Tugwood, who was noted for his thirst for information, especially about other folks' business.

Randle told him.

"'Pon my word, Ryvington, you always seem to get better prices than anybody else. Why, I have not got as much by sixpence a piece."

"That perhaps comes of the difference in quality," suggested Randle.

"But you surely don't mean to say, Ryvington, that your shirtings are sixpence a piece better than ours? A trifle better they may be, but not that much."

"Buyers don't seem to be of your opinion, Tugwood, and the proof of the pudding is in the eating, you know."

"What do you think about it, Twister?" inquired Tugwood of the man next to him. "Do you think that Ryvington's shirtings are better than ours?"

"Ay, do I. Why, there's sixpennuth moor cotton in 'em than yours, let alone better weyving. Yours is nobbut rags, mon, with th' hoiles filled up wi' china clay."

Twister had risen from the ranks, and, having made money, he naturally thought himself as good as any other body. He always spoke his mind with uncompromising bluntness, and without the least respect for persons. A roar of laughter followed his answer, for Tugwood, besides being too inquisitive and patronising to be popular, had the name of putting more filling in his goods than any other manufacturer in the trade. Not having a rejoinder ready at the moment, he judiciously gave the conversation another turn by asking if anybody present had received his assessment under schedule D, which he pronounced "sheddle."

"I guess we all have," said Twister, his stiff, red beard bristling with indignation. "I know I have, and a bonny beggar it is."

"You don't mean to say, Twister, that they have stuck you something on?"

"By gum, but haven't they! Only £2,000."

"They have increased our assessment too—very considerably," said Tugwood.

"And mine," joined in several others.

"I call it a right down hard case," observed Twister, "that we should be taxed for bigger incomes when we are making less brass."

"Are you going to appeal?"

"What is the use? I should get nowt off. I did go to Smalley one time, and tried to convince him as he had assessed me a deal too high; and I showed him figures as proved what

I said. 'And so you have not made that much, Mr. Twister?' he said, quite pleasant like. 'That I haven't, Mr. Smalley,' says I, 'and I hope you'll take my case into consideration, and knock me a thousand or two off,' says I. 'You assure me, then, Mr. Twister,' says he, 'that you have really not made within £2,000 of the amount of profit for which you are assessed?' 'I have not, Mr. Smalley,' says I, 'dall my rags if I have.' 'Then you ought to have, Mr. Twister,' said th' owd beggar, 'and I am quite unable to comply with your request to make an abatement of your assessment. I consider it to be most reasonable, and, if what you say be true, you are managing your business very badly. If you like to appeal, you can, of course, do so; but I am really afraid you would only have your trouble for your pains.'

"And did you appeal?"

"I wasn't such a fool. What would have been the use of losing both time and money? Another thing, I've given o'er making any return. I just pays what they put down. A time will happen come when they'll put down too little, and if it does, dall my rags if I'll tell 'em."

"How do you get on with these income-tax chaps, Bradshaw? Do they treat you as badly as they seem to be treating everyone else?" asked Tugwood of an individual who sat quietly smoking in a corner of the compartment, and who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation. He was a heavy pasty-faced man with a large nose, little eyes, and a very big head—like a book, some people said it was—for he possessed a marvellously retentive memory, and could calculate things mentally and instantaneously that other people had to waste a good deal of time and blacklead over. These qualities, combined with good business capacity, had raised him from the position of warehouseman and cutlooker to that of partner in one of the largest concerns in the county.

"Well, gentlemen," he observed, in answer to Tugwood's appeal, "you may say what you like about the income tax being this, that, or the other. All I can say is as I'm d—d glad I have it to pay. I never thought I should have had at one time. Them as doesn't like income tax can easy mend themselves—they've only to look cuts [cotton pieces] and cut their income down to a pound a week."

This phase of the conversation, like that about the price of Ryvington's shirtings, ended in a laugh rather at Tugwood's expense, and in no very long time thereafter the train arrived at Whitebrook.

A great gathering of horses and vehicles was ranged in front of the station—a handsome and roomy edifice—waiting for the home-coming manufacturers. Among them was the Ryvington four-wheeled drag, and the brothers mounting thereon, Bob took

the reins and drove rapidly in the direction of Redscar. After passing up a narrow street, bounded on one side by coal wharves and foundries, on the other by breweries and factories, and rising a steep hill, they entered a broad macadamised road, whose whiteness contrasted pleasantly with the coal and soot-darkened pavement they had left behind them, the more especially as the surrounding country was agreeably undulating and, for that part of the county, well-wooded.

A short spin on this road brought them to the lane leading to Redscar, which ran at right angles with the main road.

"Shall we go round by the counting-house, Randle," asked Bob, "or drive straight home?"

"I think we will go home. It is almost too late to do any good at the counting-house, and I daresay mother will be anxious to know if I am back."

"All right; here we are, then. Kenyon, jump down and open the gate. Old Jane is as deaf as a post. If she does not happen to be on the watch, you have to shout at least fifty times before you can get her out of the lodge."

Redscar House, though as to externals solid and unpretentious, was a spacious and by no means an unhandsome dwelling; and being set in a fair show of greensward and garden, and approached by an avenue of old lime-trees, populated by a colony of rooks, its general appearance was rather that of a country gentleman's seat than a manufacturer's mansion.

The drag had hardly pulled up before the substantial portico which adorned the front of the house, when the door opened and a tall lady in black silk dress and a widow's cap appeared at the threshold. Despite her sixty years, her tall form was unbent and her dark hair only slightly streaked with grey. Her features were rather large, and their expression in repose was somewhat hard and stern; but, when she caught sight of Randle, they lit up with a glow of pleasure which changed their look as if by magic into one of deepest tenderness and love.

Randle jumped from the drag, took both his mother's hands in his, and kissed her.

"I am thankful you are safe back, child," she said. "I was beginning to be anxious about you."

"So Bob has been telling me. But, dear me, mother, what was there to be anxious about? There is no more danger in a trip to Switzerland now-a-days than in a journey to London."

"We can never tell what may happen," rejoined Mrs. Ryvington, who always looked at the dark side of things. "Even a journey to London has its dangers. Are there not railway accidents? And I am always uneasy about my children when they are away from me."

"It is very well you have no more of them, then; or whatever would become of you? How would you do if you had two or three children in every quarter of the globe, like Mrs. Maitland?"

"I suppose I should have to bear it. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, you know. But won't you come into the dining-room and have some tea? I am sure you are hungry."

"Well, I do feel rather peckish. Yes, thank you, mother, I will have some tea."

"Would you like something to it?"

"I don't know whether Ran would or not," put in Bob, who had at this moment joined them, "but I know I should. Besides, what a queer tea it would be without anything to it!"

"Randle knows what I mean. Would you like some meat?"

"By all means, mother, let us have—but I know you have something ready, and I am sure it is good."

"So am I, because I know," interrupted Bob. "I heard a whisper this morning. It's boned turkey and cold boiled ham. When will tea be ready, mother?"

"In ten minutes."

"All right. In ten minutes I'll be ready too, and I bet Ran will also."

The Redscar Ryvingtons kept up the old custom of early dinners and evening teas, which latter on special occasions, such as Randle's return, were particularly strong teas, differing little from the more substantial meal save in the addition of the beverage that cheers but not inebriates.

"Have you seen much of Uncle while I have been away?" asked Randle, as his mother was pouring out his second cup of tea.

"Not very much. He has only called twice, I think; but he has been pretty often to the counting-house. Has not he, Robert?" (Mrs. Ryvington never called her second son Bob.)

"Rather—every day nearly. I never saw such a tiresome old beggar in my life."

"Robert!" exclaimed his mother, in a tone of remonstrance, "is that the way you speak of your uncle?"

"I don't care, mother, he is tiresome. He never lets a fellow alone. He was always wanting to know everything, and patronised me, and gave me fatherly advice, until at last I ran out of the counting-house whenever I saw his carriage coming over the hill; and old Pitt had standing orders never to be able to find me so long as Mr. Ryvington was on the ground. I suppose, as Randle was away, he thought he would have his fling."

"Uncle Randle has a passion for meddling, there is no doubt," said Red Randle, "and, if I had not been partner as well as executor, I don't know what I should have done. But since the

time I reminded him that I was both, and that, though I would listen to his advice, I was the sole manager of the concern and meant to remain so, he has let me alone."

"Only wait till I am partner, and I'll give him a bit of my mind too."

"He will have nothing more to do with the concern after you are a partner, Bob; he will simply be one of the trustees for the settlements."

"So much the better, for I don't like Uncle Randle a bit."

"Robert! what are you saying?" exclaimed his mother.

"It's true, mother; and one ought always to speak the truth, you know. And, if you were to speak your mind, I don't think you like him much either—any more than Ran does. What do you think he was saying the other day in Whitebrook?"

"I have not the least idea, Robert. What was it?"

"Why, that he kept 'those lads' on their legs—meaning Randle and me."

"I think I have heard of him saying something of that sort before," said Randle. "He probably thinks it his duty; he is always great on duty, you know. At any rate, it is of no consequence. If it pleases him to say so, it does us no harm."

"You are too patient, Ran. I call such statements downright annoying; as if we could not get along without him."

"Never mind," observed Randle, helping himself to a slice of boned turkey, "let him think and talk what he likes. But I will have no meddling, and that he knows. Hulloo! what is that?"

"Wheels," said Bob.

"I declare, it is Uncle Randle," exclaimed Red Randle, as a carriage drove past the dining-room window.

"Talk of the devil," muttered Bob, as the door opened, and a smart waiting maid announced Mr. Ryvington and Mr. Randle Ryvington.

CHAPTER XVI.

DEEPDENE RANDLE.

MR. RYVINGTON was a tall, rather stout, grey-haired gentleman, with a short neck, a ruddy countenance, and a somewhat high-coloured nose, a peculiarity, as also an occasional attack of gout, which was probably attributable to the fact that he thought it his duty to drink the greater part of a bottle of port wine every day with his dinner. He tried to put on a stately manner, but only

succeeded in being pompous, and, as is often the case with pompous people, his words were apt to be bigger than his deeds.

His son Randle was strikingly like his nephew Randle. Apart, they were often mistaken for each other; albeit when they were together it was impossible to doubt which was which. Deepdene Randle, though in height, feature, and complexion so much resembling his cousin that they might have been twin brothers, was slightly stouter than Redscar Randle; his eyes were a shade smaller, his face, too, was fuller, and his general aspect, some people thought, less frank and winning.

"Glad to see you back, Randle, lad," said Mr. Ryvington, as he shook hands with his nephew, after having greeted his sister-in-law. "I hope you have enjoyed yourself in Switzerland. I travelled there myself when I was a young fellow—did it all. Times were different then, though. How long were you in going from Lausanne to London?"

"Twenty-six or seven hours, I think."

"Just look at that, now. I was twelve days on the road, and did not let the grass grow under my feet either. But that is forty years since—things are very different now."

Here Mrs. Ryvington interposed to ask if he would not take a cup of tea.

"Ah, thank you, Sophia, just a cup, but nothing to eat. We dine late, you know, and I don't want to spoil my dinner. We just called *en passant*, on our way back from Orrington, you know; been to look at some property there, which I think I shall purchase, if they will take my price. I will give £9,500, and as I told Chipping, that is the agent, you know, the money is ready when he is ready, cash down, and no questions asked. Ah, ah! that is the way to do business. If I had not been well trained in business we should not have occupied the position we do now—eh, Randle, my lad?" (This was spoken to his son.) "My father, whom you two boys resemble so much, knew how to bring up a child in the way he should go, I can tell you. But it answers—that sort of bringing up answers. You will not find many men, taking it all together, who have succeeded better than me—than my brother Robert and myself. He has left you very well off, though I have perhaps been more fortunate than he has, and, please God, I'll put the family in its proper position before I have done. Is 'Ancient Families of the Northern Counties' out yet, Randle?"

"Not yet," answered his son. "I don't think it will be out for two or three months. But Peter Wiswell expects a proof every day—we have to revise it together."

"Ah, yes; I was forgetting. Did I tell you, Randle" (to his nephew) "Did I tell you that we have traced the family pedigree back to Adam de Ryvington of Angelzark, who obtained a grant

of Ryvington Pike from Edward III. for his valour at the battle of Agincourt?"

"Yes, you told me," said Randle, rather indifferently, for he had heard the story—of which he did not believe a word—at least half a dozen times before.

"It has cost me a deal of money having these researches made, as you may suppose. But that is not all. Peter Wiswell found a document the other day that carries the pedigree back a stage farther, and it appears that the father or grandfather of this Adam was a soldier of fortune, served in the Imperial Guard at Constantinople, and afterwards in Germany, where he married Hildegarde, daughter and co-heiress of Prince Hermann Barbarossa, one of the first and oldest families as is, Peter says. If he is right we have royal blood in our veins, Randle, lad. And we have got a portrait of the reigning prince, and everybody that has seen it thinks that him and me are very like."

"He has got a big red nose, then," whispered Bob to his brother.

"It is all going to appear in the 'Ancient Families of the Northern Counties.' You shall have a copy as soon as it comes out. I have ordered fifty."

"Fifty!"

"Yes, fifty at two guineas; that's the——"

"Never mind about the pedigree just now, father," interrupted his son, just in time to prevent his parent letting the cat out of the bag. "We are forgetting all about Dora. I suppose you saw Dora, Ran?"

Whereupon Randle told how he had found the young lady, and delivered the various messages with which she had charged him. After this he was asked to give some account of his wanderings—where he had been and what he had done. His first idea was to say nothing of his adventure in the Furca Pass, but remembering that he had told the story to Dora, and she might mention it in her letters home, he concluded—lest his silence should be misconstrued—to tell it a second time.

"Oh, Randle, you might have been killed," exclaimed his mother, when he had finished; and her emotion was so great that she felt constrained to retire a few minutes from the room, as her son rightly supposed to offer up a thanksgiving for his escape.

"And you saved the life of Lord Lindisfarne's daughter, of Lady Muriel Avalon!" observed Mr. Ryvington, in an awestruck tone. "How very providential!"

"And the earl asked you to Avalon Priory," said Deep Randle, with a look of envy. "You are in luck, cousin!"

"I did not say he invited me. I said he promised to send me an invitation when the family returned to England."

"It is the same thing."

"Not quite; he may forget, you know."

"Why, it is one of the oldest earldoms in the kingdom, isn't it, Randle?" asked Mr. Ryvington.

"Earl of Lindisfarne in the peerage of Scotland, and Baron Avalon of Avalon in the peerage of the United Kingdom," answered Deep Randle, who was very knowing in such matters. But the present earl is not very rich, I believe. He came into the title rather late in life—succeeded his uncle the late earl—and as he has two or three dowagers on his hands, besides other encumbrances, his income is not exactly princely. At least, so I have heard."

"But think of his high rank—Earl of Lindisfarne in the peerage of Scotland, and Baron Avalon of Avalon in the peerage of the United Kingdom—his ancient lineage and honourable name!" urged Mr. Ryvington. "What is mere income compared with such priceless advantages?"

"They would be of very little use without income, I fancy," said Red Randle. "But do you think the earl is as well off in the matter of lineage as we are, uncle? At any rate, he is not descended from the Prince Hermann what-do-you-call-him—Barbarossa—and I don't think he has royal blood in his veins."

"But that is different, you know. Not that I don't think our pedigree is as good as his; but Lord Lindisfarne is—however, there is no use talking to you about these things. You are a Radical, and would like, I daresay, to level all our ancient institutions to the ground."

"Do you consider the Ryvington pedigree, as prepared by Peter Wiswell, to be an ancient institution, uncle?" rejoined Randle, with a significant smile.

"What does it matter to you whether I do or not?" returned Mr. Ryvington, angrily. "At any rate, you are not worthy of such a pedigree. I am sorry, very sorry, Randle, to see you are such a Radical. If my poor brother could have foreseen that his son would desert the old flag, how it would have grieved him!"

"I have not deserted the old flag, uncle. I have been a Liberal ever since I began to think seriously, that is since I went to Glasgow; and I believe that in keeping my opinion in abeyance during my father's lifetime I did what was right. But I never pretended to be what I was not."

"Well, well, it is a subject about which we shall never agree, so let it drop. We are unenlightened individuals, and you are wiser than me, your father, and your grandfather all put together."

"I thought you said let it drop, uncle?"

"Well, I have done, hav'n't I? But" (looking at his watch), "bless me, how late it is; we must be going, Randle" (to his son). "I think you will find all right at the factory, Randle" (to his nephew). "I have called nearly every day during your absence—I thought it my duty, you know—as Robert will tell you, though I am sorry to say he was not always there. I had a good deal of fault to find at times—I thought it my duty, you know—but the men knew I was not to be trifled with, and, as I said, you will find things all right."

"Thank you, uncle," said Randle, gravely. "I am sure you have been very good."

"Confound his impudence," said Bob, *sotto voce*. "Why, he never came that he did not set everybody by the ears, and it was all I could do to persuade the fellows to be civil to him."

"I try to be, lad; I try to be; and if you would only follow my advice about everything you would do well. But we cannot put old heads on young shoulders. You know the saying: Young folks think old folks are fools; old folks know that young folks are. Come, Randle, lad, let us be off. We shall be half-an-hour late for dinner as it is."

"I think my uncle is getting slightly crazed about the antiquity of the Ryvington family," said the other Randle, as he returned to the dining-room after seeing that gentleman and his son into their carriage. "It was always a weak point with him, but he talked greater nonsense to-night than I ever heard him talk before. If he swallows that story about our descent from Prince Hermann Barbarossa he'll swallow anything."

"But do you think he does believe it, Randle?" asked his mother.

"I fancy he does. When a vain man wants very much to believe something that exalts him in his own estimation, and, as he thinks, in that of his neighbours, he generally succeeds."

"Peter Wiswell makes a nice penny out of him."

"Rather. And Peter will go on making bogus pedigrees as long as he is paid for them. That was really a fine stroke of his to connect us with the Barbarossa family. Why Prince Barbarossa is half-cousin to the Queen, brother-in-law to the Emperor of Austria, and akin to half the royal houses in Europe."

"It will all appear as large as life in the 'Ancient Families of the Northern Counties,' I suppose? That's another of Peter's speculations. Oh, he's a very downy gentleman, is Mr. Wiswell. Did you hear what my uncle said—that he had agreed to take fifty copies at two guineas each? And he would have said more if my cousin had not stopped him."

"What would he have said?"

"That his taking fifty copies was the condition on which his

bogus pedigree was to figure among those of the ancient families of the northern counties."

"And then?"

"Why, he thinks it will be the means of attaining the great object of his ambition—getting the Ryvingtons of Deepdene recognised as a county family, and himself admitted to the intimacy of such people as the Claughtons, the Myerscoughs, and the Stalmines."

"Do you think he will succeed?"

"No; they don't like him. They don't like his bumptiousness. They have heard of his meannesses, and they laugh at his claims to ancient lineage. He would have had a far better chance of getting his ends if he had not pretended to be more than he is—a retired manufacturer of honourable family. It is Deepdene that has spoiled my uncle. My father used to say that, though my uncle was always a bit soft on the pedigree question, he was a very sensible man so long as he was in the concern. But he is not the first, by a long way, who has been demoralised by prosperity and the possession of land."

"But he is very shrewd in some things, Randle," observed his mother. "See how well he manages his property. And I have heard your poor father say that the purchase of Deepdene was almost a stroke of genius."

"Shrewd! I should think he is. In money matters there is nobody more so. Very few people have anything to do with Uncle Randle, except Peter Wiswell, that don't come off second best. As Jack Blezzard would say, they generally get hold of the dirty end of the stick."

"And some people say the deep 'un" (this was a designation Bob had conferred on his cousin) "is quite as keen."

"I don't know about that. But it is likely enough, for he looks at everything from one point of view—that of his own interest. He did at school, and I don't suppose he has altered much since."

"But does not everybody do the same?" put in Bob.

"Every unregenerate person does, Robert," observed his mother, with a little sigh, "and I am afraid your cousin Randle is one."

"And not the only one, by a long chalk," muttered Bob.

"Very likely," continued Randle, not heeding these interruptions; "but there are degrees. What I mean is, that whenever anything happens that can touch himself or the family, the first thought that occurs to Randle is: How will this affect me? And he never tries to rise above this egotism, or to fight against the selfish impulses from which nobody is wholly free. And, unless his actions belie him, he is shaping his life on the principle

of placing his own comfort and ambition before every other consideration—before even his duty to his father or the affection he owes his sister, to say nothing of outsiders.”

“Are you not judging him rather hardly, my dear?” rejoined Mrs. Ryvington. “I know he is very worldly, but to say he is utterly selfish seems rather uncharitable.”

“I merely say what I believe to be true, mother. You know Randle and I have been schoolfellows, and I have very good grounds to go upon. Time will show whether I am right or not. If I am not, so much the better.”

CHAPTER XVII.

PEDIGREE PETER.

“COUSIN RANDLE is in luck,” said the other Randle to his father, as the two drove away from Redscar.

“In having rendered so important a service to Lord Lindisfarne’s family, you mean?”

“Not so much that as in having got introduced to the family, and received an invitation to Avalon Priory.”

“Yes. I wish it had been your luck instead of his. If we were on visiting terms with the Lindisfarnes, Sir Humphrey Stalmine would think twice before refusing my invitations to dinner, as he did the last time I asked him. But do you think you would have had the presence of mind, Randle, to have plucked that girl, the Lady Muriel, from the carriage?”

“Oh, yes, I think so. And very likely my cousin makes the most of it. I don’t suppose it was so much of a feat as he makes it appear.”

“I don’t agree with you there, Randle. I have no great cause to love my nephew; he is not too respectful, and refuses to follow my advice; but, whatever may be his faults, he is at least sincere and truthful.”

“A man may exaggerate, may he not, without absolutely lying? Well, I think Randle’s story of the rescue, and that, is too strange to be altogether true. Let us see whether he is really asked to Avalon Priory or not. That will be the test. If he is not, we shall know what conclusion to draw.”

“If he is, he will perhaps introduce you and me, so for goodness’ sake don’t let him suppose you doubt his word. If we could ask the Stalmines and Myerscoughs to dinner to meet the Earl of Lindisfarne it would be the making of us. Until we can

do something of the sort, or can get you a high-born wife, I am afraid we shall not be admitted into the county set. I should like you to marry well, Randle."

"And I mean to marry well if I can get a chance. But how am I to go about it? These people never invite me to their houses. I should like to propose to Miss Claughton, but I never see her except in the hunting field."

"But you will be very well off, Randle, and Miss Claughton is not rich. They say her father cannot leave her more than five thousand pounds, and will not give her a penny down."

"That may be. But you will worsen my chance of marrying blood much, father, if you persist in dividing the property equally between Dora and myself."

"There is no help for it, Randle. I promised your mother before she died that I would leave you equal. Besides, it is in the settlement. Your mother's fortune was twenty thousand pounds, which I thought a great deal thirty years since—it was as much almost as I had myself—and we agreed, and it was put down in the deed, that my property as well as hers should be equally divided among any children we might have. It is an engagement to which I have put my hand and seal, and there is no getting out of it. But I promise you one thing, Randle, that my will shall be made in such a way that it will be entirely your own fault if you do not come into all my property, with the exception of a small legacy to Dora in addition to what she takes under her mother's settlement; and that she will, of course, have when she is twenty-one. I don't believe in large fortunes for girls."

"But how on earth will you manage that, father?" said the young man, eagerly. "I cannot conceive."

"I daresay you cannot, and I do not mean to tell you. You will know soon enough; that is, when my last will and testament is read. Meantime you have no reason to complain. You have the interest of your mother's ten thousand pounds, and that, with your allowance from me, is equal to £1,000 a year; besides which, you live free of charge at Deepdene, and I keep your horses. It is more than Sir Humphrey Stalmine allows his son. You are very well off, my lad, whatever you may think."

"I was not complaining, father; only, if you want me to marry blood, I must be in a position to do so; and, if it were given out that I am to inherit all your real estate, I should be a deal more of a catch, don't you see?"

"All right, my lad. You find the blood, and I'll find the groats. Talking of marrying, do you think your cousin Randle cares at all for Dora?"

"I do think so. Ran is very close in some respects, and hard

to read ; but I think he is fond of Dora, and I am sure she likes him. At any rate, they have always cottoned to each other a good deal. Why do you ask the question—would you like them to make a match of it ? ”

“ Not particularly ; I was only asking for information. As for Dora marrying, it will be time enough to think about that two or three years hence. I don't believe in girls marrying so very early,” with the utterance of which sentiment Mr. Ryvington fell into a brown study, of which his son took advantage to light a cigar, and indulge in a smoke that lasted until they reached the gates of Deepdene Park.

Deepdene lay about two miles from Whitebrook, but the estate to which it gives a name was almost conterminous with the northern boundary of the borough. Its purchase by the elder Ryvington was regarded, not only by his brother, but by the world of Whitebrook generally, as a stroke of genius. From almost time immemorial Deepdene had belonged to the Earls of Holleth, and been under settlements so strict that, although much of it was most desirable building land, nobody could be persuaded to build upon it. The longest lease the Holleth trustees were empowered to grant was sixty years, and Whitebrook manufacturers absolutely refused to build factories on a tenure so onerous. Mr. Ryvington had often cast his eye on the property and calculated its value to an enterprising man unfettered by absurd restrictions, and he resolved, if ever the opportunity should arise, to become its owner. The opportunity did arise. When Lord Forton, the Earl of Holleth's heir, attained his majority it was arranged to sell the Lancashire estates and invest the proceeds in land in Staffordshire. Mr. Ryvington, who was on friendly terms with the local steward, getting a word of this before anybody else in the neighbourhood, went up to London, saw the lawyers engaged in the matter, and succeeded in buying the whole estate at the rate of twenty-five years' purchase of its agricultural value. It would have been cheap at double the money. Some rich Whitebrook people, who would gladly have bought Deepdene, when they know how acutely Mr. Ryvington had out-generalled them, were much annoyed that he should have acquired the property for so inadequate a price ; and it was broadly insinuated that he had bought the steward as well as the estate, if he had not bought the lawyers. To these insinuations—if they came to his ears—he paid no heed, but busied himself almost day and night in developing the resources and increasing the capabilities of his purchase. Being just outside the borough, and therefore escaping the heavy borough rates, yet close to the railway and well supplied with water, it quickly came into vogue as a site for factories and cottages, and grew so fast in value that

when Robert Ryvington died his brother was a man of £10,000 a year, albeit the possibilities of the property were by no means exhausted.

One of Mr. Ryvington's first proceedings, after paying off the mortgage which he had raised in order to enable him to complete his purchase, was to restore the old house in Deepdene Park, into which no Holleth had put his head for half a century. It was a fine old timbered mansion, standing on a grassy knoll, flanked by a small lake, and approached by a grand avenue of chestnut-trees. When its owner sent out invitations for his house-warming he felt that he was at length on the point of reaching the secret ambition of his life, and becoming, not only a country but a county gentleman, as he was already a county magistrate. Bitter, therefore, was his disappointment when none of the gentry of the neighbourhood accepted his invitation. They all replied very courteously and made very plausible excuses. One had the influenza, another had a wife in the straw, another had a sick son, others had previous engagements—all had something, and the end of it was that the county families were conspicuous by their absence, and their places had to be filled up at the last moment by an equal number of the despised people of Whitebrook. It next occurred to Mr. Ryvington that the one thing needful was a pedigree, that if his family could be proved to be of a respectable antiquity—and he had an impression derived from his own consciousness that the proof would be easy—the position to which he aspired would readily be accorded to him.

In this emergency he bethought himself of Peter Wiswell, a local genealogist, journalist, antiquarian, author, and poetaster; for Peter was as great a hand at turning verses for puffing tradesmen as in making pedigrees for aspiring manufacturers. In early life Peter had come to grief as a bookseller and stationer, whereupon, to use his own expression, "he had betaken himself to a literary career." His great achievement in this line, the one of which he was most justly proud, was his "Whitebrook As It Is." He was commissioned to write the work for an enterprising publisher, who proposed to bring it out in combination with a directory. There was a little preliminary difficulty about the terms. Peter wanted a lump sum for the job; the publisher wanted to pay by results. In the end Peter agreed to accept so much a sheet, and the price was so low that the publisher thought he had made a most excellent bargain. But the poor man had forgotten to make any stipulation about quantity, the amount of "copy" to be supplied being left implicitly to the author's discretion, and he sent in, week after week, such piles of manuscript, that the unfortunate publisher was driven to the verge of

despair. Peter wrote both a preface and an introduction. In the former he had much to say about the ancient Britons, the Romans, the Angles and Saxons, and the Danes, "who harassed this part and made sad havoc in their incursions." The introduction was a philosophical treatise in which Peter expressed his views on things in general in sentences of portentous length. "The irregular progression of society," he observed, "in intellectual development, in moral force, in religious fervour, and in mercantile prosperity—its advances, retrogradations, aberrations, and intervals of quiescence are phenomena hard to understand and difficult to explain. There are, indeed, known to thoughtful observers and students of humanity, physical causes and ethical combinations on which philosophy is accustomed to base its estimates of particular social epochs and political revolutions; but there would seem to be something more recondite than their agency, which produces, at fixed intervals, an unwonted activity of mind and removes the time and ages in which it occurs from the common roll of history and its records; and it is because of the faithful tracing from cause to effect of unbroken concatenation in the chain of great events and momentous cataclysms, and of the well-detailed and practical illustration which furnishes a complete clavis to their connection with, and affinity for, each other, that I experience such deep and unfeigned pleasure in bringing a work of this nature forward, as being a history of the ancient that renowned town of Whitebrook, a town whose present commercial development is on a par with its local importance in the days of the Plantagenet and Tudor monarchs of this realm of England."

There was no event in the history of the borough that Mr. Wiswell thought too trivial to be chronicled. When he came to the year 1839 he observed: "About this time we were chequered in our business," a euphemism by which the few who were still cognisant of the circumstances were reminded that in 1839 was the year of Peter's bankruptcy. He devoted three chapters to the market house alone. He told of the time when, in the infancy of the town, old women who sold sweetstuff and potatoes were exposed without any protection, save such as their umbrellas afforded them, to all the inclemencies of the weather; and drew a pathetic picture of their sufferings. He next described in great detail a wooden shed—the first attempt at a covered market—which had been erected by a charitable townsman at his own expense to protect "these poor but industrious and honest creatures from the fury of the elements." And so he went on, until he came to the new market house, which he described from its very inception to the weather vane on its top, and wound up his narrative by observing, that "over the principal entrance is a

handsome lantern (by Messrs. Hodges and Podges, of this town), placed there for the purpose of giving light."

The bookseller declared that he was going to be ruined, and offered to give Peter double the lump sum he had at first asked, on condition that he should keep his "copy" within reasonable bounds, an offer that the writer of "Whitebrook As It Is" accepted with feigned reluctance but inward rejoicing.

Peter's fame as a genealogist dated from the time when he found a pedigree, a new name, and a coat of arms for the Bellows family. Joe Bellows, its founder, had started life in Whitebrook as a working blacksmith and beershop keeper. He was so illiterate that he could hardly write his own name, yet so shrewd and energetic withal that he won wide renown and a large fortune as a maker of boilers and steam engines. All that he knew of his ancestry was that his father had been transported for life for killing a fellow-workman in a drunken brawl; and when his two sons, to whose industry his success was largely due, suggested that his new carriage could not be considered complete without a crest on the panels, he had to be told what a crest was. But he let the lads have their way.

"It maks no difference to me," said honest Joe, "what mack [sort] of a pictur they painten on th' panels."

So Peter Wiswell, who had really a fair smattering of heraldic and archæologic lore, was called into council, and speedily produced a coat-of-arms and a crest which made a very pretty show when emblazoned on the new carriage. Nor was this all. Joe's children did not like their name. It was bad that the father was generally spoken of as Old Bellows (among the hands in familiar converse this became "Owd-Bellies-to-Mend"), but what most hurt their feelings was, that the family at large should always be designated as "them Bellowses." This grievance suggested to Peter one of his happiest inspirations—rather, let us say, one of his most remarkable discoveries. He found out that the true, original name of the family was not Bellows at all, but Bellasis. Bellows was a modern corruption, a proposition which Peter supported by documentary proof—extracts from registers and so forth—and a pedigree that carried conviction to the minds of the entire family, except the head of it, who, when it was proposed to change his name, swore with a big oath that Joe Bellows he was born and Joe Bellows he would die. But few men can withstand the importunity of wife and children; and the old blacksmith and boiler-maker is described, on the marble tablet which chronicles his virtues and records his death, as "Joseph Bellasis, Esq., a deputy lieutenant and justice of the peace of this county," and his grandchildren, if not his children, are fully convinced that they come of a lordly stock.

In short, Peter was a genius; and, as may be supposed, he had not much difficulty in providing Mr Ryvington with a pedigree entirely to his satisfaction. Knowing his man, he did not hesitate to give him a very distinguished ancestry indeed. Perhaps the only person at Whitebrook who believed that the Ryvingtons were akin to the royal house of Barbarossa was the owner of Deepdene himself.

As for Wiswell, his celebrity as a genealogist won for him the name of "Pedigree Peter," a name which he retained to the day of his death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

DORA was as good as her word. The spring following Randle's memorable excursion in Switzerland, she returned from Nyon under the escort of her brother, reaching Deepdene a few days before Robert Ryvington's twenty-first birthday, and in time to take part in the informal council which was held to consider in what manner the event should be celebrated.

"I am going to Redscar this afternoon, Dora," said Mr. Ryvington, as they were taking breakfast together the morning after his daughter's arrival; "will you bear me company? I daresay your aunt would like to see you."

"Certainly, papa. It is my duty to see Aunt Sophia, you know, and I think I should have gone to Redscar to-day—at any rate, to-morrow—even if you had not been going. What is going to be done about Bob's birthday?"

"That is one of the things we have to talk about. Your aunt hinted the other day that they would like to have my advice, though I am not sure that I shall give it."

"Why not, papa?" asked Dora, in a tone of some surprise; for she had observed that advice was the only thing her father ever gave freely.

"Well, you see, Dora, my authority as executor ceases the day Robert is of age. He goes into partnership with Randle, and henceforth they conduct the concern on their own responsibility. I shall have nothing more to do with it."

"But if they ask your advice, you know?"

"It is exactly what they have not done. Your aunt has; but I have had to complain ever since my brother's death of the little attention the young men have paid to my wishes. I am only

afraid, now that they are their own masters, they will make ducks and drakes of the property; and I should be sorry indeed if the concern were to go down. But I fear it will; I fear it will."

"But I thought Randle was such a good business man, papa. I have heard people say that the Redscar mills are almost the best managed in Whitebrook."

"Who says so?"

"Why, did not that Mr. Riser who was here last night say so?"

"Ah, yes, I remember. But he forgets that Randle has never yet been left to himself. Since his father's death he has always had me to look after him; and, though he has not observed my advice as he ought to have done, my position as executor has enabled me to veto more than one questionable scheme. And he has notions about treating the hands that will never answer."

"How, papa?"

"Why, he thinks he can rule them by kindness; but he'll find it out; they will let him see."

"But is it not our duty as Christians, papa, to treat everybody with kindness, whether they are hands or not? You know we are told to love our neighbours as ourselves."

"Do you consider that our work-people are our neighbours, then?"

"Cousin Randle's work-people are his neighbours at any rate, papa."

"You are much too literal, Dora," rejoined her father, tersely. "Besides, girls do not understand these things. When you are older, you will think differently. But I must be going; I have an appointment with Riser at nine o'clock. How that man has got on, to be sure! I can remember him being a weaver at Redscar, and now he wants to take land for another loom shed, and he has nearly one thousand looms already."

"Will Randle go with us to Redscar?" asked Dora, who did not seem greatly interested in Mr. Riser and his looms.

"I am sure I don't know. You can ask him when he comes down to breakfast. I shall be out all morning. We leave at two o'clock, remember; I have some matters of business to arrange with my nephews."

"Very well, papa. I will be ready."

Half an hour after Mr. Ryvington's departure, his son Randle sauntered languidly into the morning-room, where the Ryvingtons generally breakfasted when they were without guests.

"How late you are, Randle!" said his sister. "It's past nine o'clock!"

"Nine o'clock! Do you call that late? I call it early."

"It seems very late to me. At Villa Artemisia we breakfasted in summer at half-past six, and in winter at seven o'clock."

"That is all very well for Swiss schoolgirls," yawned Deep Randle, as he drew a chair to the table and cut himself a slice of ham, "but you won't persuade me to breakfast either at half-past six or half-past seven, nor even half-past eight. Pour me out a cup of tea, there's a good girl. Where has the governor gone?"

"He has gone to see Mr. Riser about some land."

"Glad to hear it. That means an addition to the value of the estate. I hope my father will make Mr. Riser pay a good price. I think he will, for our revered parent is not easily beaten at a bargain. What are you going to do with yourself to-day, Dora?"

"Papa and I are going to Redscar after luncheon. Papa has something to arrange with Randle and Bob, and I want to see Aunt Sophia. Will you go with us, Ran?"

"No, I don't think I shall."

"Why? I am sure Aunt Sophia and the cousins would be glad to see you."

"I am not. At least, so far as the cousins are concerned, and Aunt Sophia wearies me with her canting conversation."

"Aunt Sophia never cants, Randle. She has her faults, perhaps—who has not?—but insincerity is not one of them; and she is always very kind."

"I will say, then, by her frequent references to religion, and the tacit assumption of infallibility, which is the badge of that party in the Church to which she belongs. She speaks of me as worldly, I believe; that means, I suppose, that I am not, like herself, a self-elected saint. At any rate, I am as saintly as either of her sons, even as that paragon of perfection, my cousin and namesake. Did you hear of that wonderful exploit of his in Switzerland—the rescue of Lord Lindisfarne's daughter, I mean?"

"Yes, I heard; what then?" replied Dora, with a contemptuous curl of her lip.

"What then! Why, it is all a cram, or at any rate a gross exaggeration."

"You don't mean what you say, Randle; you cannot mean it," exclaimed Dora, passionately. "You know as well as I know that Randle Ryvington of Redscar is utterly incapable of telling a deliberate falsehood."

"Oh, we are indignant, are we?" said the other, with a sneer. "Well, since you put it in that way, Dora, let me tell you that I don't know that my cousin Randle—or anybody else, for

that matter—is utterly incapable of telling a deliberate falsehood, if the inducement is sufficient.”

“Oh, Randle, if you talk like that,” rejoined the girl in a voice trembling with emotion, “you will make me almost dislike you. But you cannot mean what you say. You are only trying to tease me. Besides, I know that my cousin did rescue Lady Muriel Avalon, when she was run away with in the Furca Pass.”

“How do you know? Were you there?”

“No; but I saw an account of it in the *Gazette de Lausanne*.”

“I don’t know anything about the *Gazette de Lausanne*,” answered Deep Randle, whose scepticism this statement seemed somewhat to shake. “But just tell me this. If my cousin really did what he says he did, he laid the Lindisfarne family under a great obligation. Yet they take not the slightest notice of him. He said he was going to see them at Avalon Priory, but he has never been, and, so far as I know, has received no communication from them. Is it credible that if he had rendered them so important a service they would not acknowledge it in some way?”

“The invitation never came, then?”

“Not it; shouldn’t we all have known if it had? I have asked Randle two or three times when he was going to Avalon Priory. The last time I asked him he seemed rather waxy, and wanted to know what business it was of mine; so, seeing the subject was a delicate one, I just let it drop.”

“I don’t wonder he was vexed. Such ingratitude would vex anybody, let alone your sneers, and I daresay you did sneer,” exclaimed Dora, with great warmth. “But I don’t care. Randle did rescue Lady Muriel, and nearly lost his life by trying to get up the body of the governess from the place where it had fallen. I am as sure of it as if I had been there myself; and, after what he has done, the conduct of the Lindisfarnes is simply disgraceful. If Randle is vexed it is because of their ingratitude. As for their invitation, I don’t believe he cares for it one bit. I don’t believe, if it came now, he would accept it.”

“Not care for an invitation from the Earl of Lindisfarne?” rejoined Randle, with a mocking laugh. “I pity your innocence, Dora. Why, it is exactly what he does care for. He would give his ears for an invitation.”

“You would, I daresay. But I will talk no more with you, Randle. I shall not be able to keep my temper if I do. Do you want any more tea? I am going into the garden.”

“No, I don’t want any more tea. By all means go into the garden if you want to go.”

"If that young lady is not in love with her cousin Randle," muttered her brother, as the door closed behind Dora, "the female mind is an unfathomable mystery."

They met a little later in the garden, as Randle was returning from the stables, when Dora again asked him to accompany her father and herself to Redscar. He again declined, but this time a little more graciously, adding that as he was under a long-standing engagement to be present at an agricultural show in the neighbourhood he could not go if he would. Dora had her doubts as to the entire accuracy of this statement; but it was so far satisfactory that it might seem to account for her brother's non-appearance at Redscar.

During the remainder of the morning Dora thought of little else than her cousin and the Lindisfarnes. Though since Randle's visit to Nyon she had not once heard from him, she never doubted that he had made the contemplated visit to Avalon Priory; she had even reproached him in her thoughts for his failure to write to her as he had promised, a failure which she was disposed to attribute to the fascinations of Lady Muriel, with whom she made up her mind that he had fallen in love. The news that he had not been to Avalon Priory at all was almost startling. This contingency was one the possibility of which had never occurred to her. Despite her brother's assurance that Randle had received no communication from Lord Lindisfarne since their parting at Brigue, Dora finally came to the conclusion that it was more probable he had received and refused—for reasons best known to himself—an invitation, than that he should not have received one at all, a refusal with which she had a vague suspicion that she herself might be not remotely connected.

This theory was, however, rather rudely shaken by a conversation she had with her father on their way to Redscar. She told him what had passed between her brother and herself on the subject, and asked him what he thought about it.

"It's a very strange affair," said Mr. Ryvington. "I don't understand it at all."

"But are you sure, papa, that Randle has received no communication whatever from Lord Lindisfarne?"

"He says he has not."

"How long ago did he say so?"

"I don't know exactly how long. Three or four months, perhaps."

"May he not have heard something since?"

"He may, of course; but, when I saw that Randle did not like being questioned on the subject, I questioned him no more. He's rather testy if you tread on his corns, my nephew is. Still

I don't think he has heard. If he had received an invitation to Avalon Priory we should all know, of course."

"But suppose the invitation was so long delayed, or so coldly given, that Randle, feeling hurt, declined it, and told nobody?"

Mr. Ryvington, instead of replying, shrugged his shoulders and smiled. No more than his son could he believe in the possibility of anybody refusing an invitation from an earl, whether long delayed or coldly given.

"I know what you mean, papa; but I am sure that cousin Randle is quite capable of declining an invitation from Lord Lindisfarne, or any other lord. But you surely don't share in my brother's opinion, that Randle never met the Lindisfarnes, and that it is all a made-up story?"

"No," said the old gentleman, reflectively. "It's queer, certainly—very queer; but I don't think that. As I have said before, though my nephew Randle is not always as respectful as he might be, he is, I believe, an honest man. At any rate, he is not a fool, and I do not see what he could hope to gain by inventing such a story, and above all by saying that he was going to Avalon Priory, if he had no ground to go upon. Such a proceeding could only bring upon him discredit and expose him to ridicule. As it is, many people believe that it was a piece of bounce—about the invitation, I mean."

"Did he tell many people, then?"

"No, I don't think he did; but these things get out, you know. Your brother mentioned it to the Stalmines and one or two others—that is what makes him so sore; and, for my own part, I did not think it my duty to make a secret of it, you know. I did not see the necessity. Altogether, it has been a very annoying piece of business for us all."

Mr. Ryvington judiciously omitted to mention that both he and his son had told pretty nearly everybody they knew of Red Randle's exploit in the Furca Pass, and of his expected visit to Avalon Priory. They had even gone so far as to hint that Lord Lindisfarne was expected at Whitebrook in the course of the winter, and that Mr. Ryvington, as head of the family, would give a grand dinner in his honour at Deepdene, to which all the gentry of the neighbourhood were to be invited.

"I am glad, however, papa, that you do not think, with my brother, that Randle has been deliberately deceiving us."

"No, I don't think so," replied Mr. Ryvington, but rather less confidently than before, for the conversation had revived the bitterness of his disappointment about the dinner party, on which he had counted to launch himself, once for all, into county society. "But I do not think that the matter

requires explanation. Either the Earl of Lindisfarne said he would have my nephew at Avalon Priory, or he did not. If he did say so, why has the invitation never come? The supposition that his lordship has failed in his promise is not admissible, for noblemen of his rank are always as good as their word. *Noblesse oblige*, you know. At the same time I should be sorry to think that my nephew, for some incomprehensible reason

“Your nephew is quite incapable of doing anything dishonourable,” interrupted Dora, impetuously. “I know very little about noblemen and their ways, but I do know Cousin Randle; and I would rather take his word than that of any duke or earl or baron in the kingdom. In my opinion, Lord Lindisfarne and his wife, and his daughter, whose life my cousin saved, are ungrateful wretches. Their treatment of him is disgraceful; they may be noble, but they are not gentle. The acquaintance of such people is no honour; I would rather associate with honest factory folks.”

“Dora, Dora, what are you saying?” exclaimed her father, almost breathless with astonishment at the vehemence of his daughter’s language. “Never let me hear you utter such sentiments again. They are low, they are radical, they are unladylike, they are—in fact they are bad form in every way. I do hope they have not turned you into a Nihilist, or a republican, or something equally dreadful, at Villa Artemisia. If I thought so, I do believe—”

Mr. Ryvington’s belief in the matter was destined never to be known, for the suggestion that she could possibly have learnt anything politically heterodox from Mademoiselle Vientemps tickled Dora so much that she interrupted her father with a merry laugh.

“Why, don’t you know, papa dear, that mademoiselle is far more conservative than you are yourself? She adores the memories of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, hates all republics with undying hatred, and would rather have a rattlesnake in her house than a radical. Oh, Mademoiselle Vientemps is the most correct person in the world, I do assure you.”

“I am very glad to hear it; but where have you got your ideas, then? I am sure you did not get them at Deepdene.”

“I do not think I did,” replied Dora, with a look which, if her father’s quickness of apprehension had been on a par with his sharpness at making a bargain, he would have understood to imply that, in her opinion, Deepdene was not a place especially rich in ideas of any sort.

“Well, then, I hope you will get rid of them at Deepdene;

for they are not ideas that I like my daughter to hold. But here we are at Redscar. Driffield will drive you up to the house. I will get out here and walk down to the mill, where I have to meet my nephews."

CHAPTER XIX.

A PEACE-OFFERING.

WHEN Mr. Ryvington joined his daughter at Rêdscar House he was in high good humour. His nephews had presented him with a handsome chronometer repeater, striking the hours and quarters, furnished with a perpetual calendar, and emblazoned with the Ryvington arms. They offered it to him, Randle said, as a token of their respect, and in acknowledgment of his services as executor during Robert's minority. The old gentleman was lifted into the seventh heaven of delight, and expressed his thoughts in a long, but slightly incoherent speech; and when he showed the watch to Dora it was easy to see, by her kindling eye and the increased animation of her countenance, that she, too, was deeply gratified.

In answer to an inquiry from herself and her father, Randle said that he had ordered the watch at Geneva, but that watches with highly complicated movements are only cased, finished and regulated in that city, the mechanism being made in the valley of Joux, near the lake of that name, in the Vaudois Jura. He further told them that, albeit that Genevan and other watch-makers sell timekeepers of complex construction as entirely their own manufacture, they are an exclusive speciality of the Joux Valley, the horologists of no other locality, in Switzerland or out of it, being able to make these movements, or, at any rate, to make their production a commercial success.

"Well, I suppose there are tricks in all trades, and you were always clever at rooting things out, Randle," said Mr. Ryvington, whose present disposed him to be complimentary. "I have heard your poor father say it of you many a time, and I have perceived it myself. It is an excellent quality in a business man, that power of rooting things out—getting to the bottom of 'em, eh, Bob? I was good at rooting things out myself when I was a young fellow. They could not palm much false-packed cotton on me, those Liverpool fellows. I always took the cotton buying when I was in the concern, you know. Well, about this watch, you know" (regarding it complacently), "as I told you down at the counting-house, I shall prize it and

wear it as long as I live. I consider it my duty to do so, and after my death I shall give it—I mean before my death I shall transmit it as an heirloom to my son, to remain in the family as—as—yes, as an everlasting memorial of this day—of Bob's twenty-first birthday, I mean."

Mrs. Ryvington gave her sons a significant glance, which they both rightly interpreted as meaning "I told you so." The idea of the present had, in fact, originated with her, and been carried out almost at her sole instance, for Randle did not regard the project with much favour, and Robert had vigorously opposed it.

"We owe Uncle Randle no gratitude," he had said, "and I will be no party in making him a present."

Randle knew his mother's motive. The relations between the two families had become unpleasantly strained, and in the interest of peace and goodwill she was desirous to mark the occasion of Robert's majority by strengthening the fast-weakening ties which had formerly united Deepdene and Redscar. She had also another and less disinterested motive; for, whatever might be the case with the elect, Mrs. Ryvington in her dealings with the world showed much more of the cunning of the serpent than the meekness of the dove. She feared that a feud between Redscar and Deepdene might militate against the interests of her sons. She could not foresee exactly how, but she had a very strong presentiment to that effect; and on general grounds she was of opinion—an opinion which she strove very earnestly to impress on Randle and Robert—that young people, at the outset of life, should spare no pains to make friends; and that, seeing the wealth and the influence of their uncle, it was well worth their while (worldly speaking) to be on good terms with him. In the end she had her way, and the watch was bought, although neither Randle nor Robert was quite convinced that the gift would have all the effect she anticipated from it.

"It may please my uncle, though I am not quite sure even about that," said Randle; "but it will not propitiate my cousin. He is no friend of ours, and never will be, do what we may. However, let it be as you say, mother. It is well to try to promote goodwill, even if we have little hope of success."

The mention of Bob's birthday by Mr. Ryvington suggested the question as to how it should be kept.

"Robert wants to give a dinner party and a dance," observed Mrs. Ryvington, in a tone as serious as if she were discussing the day of judgment; "but a dinner party would give a vast deal of trouble, and dancing, I am afraid, is very worldly. Besides, it is hardly two years since his father died, and it might be

thought we were not paying proper respect to his memory. No, I do not think I should like to have a dance in the house."

Bob, to whom these arguments did not altogether commend themselves, was on the point of asking his mother if she objected to a dance out of the house, when he was anticipated by Dora.

"Well, then," she said, "suppose we have a picnic, aunt. Take some carriages, start early in the morning, and have a long day in the country."

"Capital," exclaimed Bob, who at length saw his way to the much-longed-for dance; "I beg leave to second that motion."

"Yes," said Mrs. Ryvington, who felt that Dora's plan would remove a great weight from her mind, for there was nothing she more disliked than such a disturbance of the regularity of her household arrangements as the giving of a party would have entailed. "I think that would be very nice. What do you think, Randle?" (to her brother-in-law).

"I quite agree with you, Sophia; nothing could be nicer. But, look here, why not have your pic-nic at Deepdene? We have plenty of room in the park, and we will have dinner or tea, or something, out in the open, under the trees. Yes, by all means come to Deepdene. And then after sunset, you know, we could light up the terrace and the garden with Chinese lanterns."

"That would be very, very nice, papa, but I do not think it is exactly what we want. We want a long drive in the country; the drive would be the best part of it. Don't you think so, Bob? It has to be your entertainment, you know. I am only suggesting."

"You express my opinion exactly, Dora—the drive, by all means. At the same time we are very much obliged to Uncle Randle for the offer."

"Yes, it is very kind of papa; but we mean to have a *fête champêtre* at Deepdene all the same, although not on Bob's birthday. But I don't believe in eating on the grass—there are always nasty earwigs and ants and things about."

"Well, everything considered, I prefer sitting on a chair myself," observed Bob, sententiously. "Could we not regale ourselves in some country inn and—"

"And get up a dance," he was going to say, but fearing some objection from his mother he prudently checked himself in time.

"An excellent idea, Bob," rejoined Dora, "I vote for the country inn. Don't you think so, Cousin Randle?"

"It's Bob's birthday we are going to keep, you know, and whatever pleases you and him will please me. Yes, let us have the drive and the country inn, by all means."

Thereupon followed an animated conversation as to the

direction they should take, and it was finally decided to drive to Salley Abbey, and after a ramble by the Ribble to hold their revels in the inn at Chatburn.

All the available vehicles of the two families were to be placed in requisition, and if those did not suffice additional carriages were to be hired at Whitebrook.

"You will come, of course, uncle?" said Randle.

"Certainly," answered Mr. Ryvington, as he trifled with the chain of his new repeater. "It will be a great pleasure, and even if it were not a pleasure it would be my duty to be present on the occasion. We old folks—your mother and I, you know—and my sister will all go together in our pony phaeton."

"No, Randle, you must let me stay at home," said Mrs. Ryvington, as she laboriously rubbed her spectacles with her pocket-handkerchief. "Randle and Robert will both be away, and there is no telling what might happen. I shall be quite happy here, thinking how you are all enjoying yourselves."

"Bother!" exclaimed Bob. "How can anything happen? It won't be the first time the place has been left to itself for a day."

"I should not be content, I am sure I should not."

"Oh, but we cannot do without you, aunt," put in Dora.

"You really must go with us, Sophia," observed Mr. Ryvington. "I consider, it is nothing less than your duty to go."

"I think you had better make one of us, mother," said Randle, quietly, putting his hand on hers; "you know Bob will never be twenty-one again. This is the last coming of age we shall have to celebrate."

Thus pressed, Mrs. Ryvington was constrained to yield, albeit not without a long-drawn sigh and a deprecatory shake of the head, as if to signify that she was of the same opinion still, and yielded only to overwhelming force.

"You made a mistake just now, Cousin Randle," remarked Dora, when this knotty point had been settled. "Bob's coming of age is not the last we shall have to celebrate, unless indeed you count on my never being twenty-one. Be good enough to remember that even now I am in my twentieth year."

"I beg your pardon very much, Dora," laughed Randle. "I meant our family, of course. I hope we shall live to celebrate your majority in a manner becoming the occasion."

"Please God, we may," sighed Mrs. Ryvington, who was feeling decidedly unhappy at the idea of the house and the mills being deserted by every member of the family for a whole day. "But there is no telling what may happen. We know not what a day may bring forth, and your uncle and I are getting into years; maybe——"

"You forget that other text, mother," interposed Randle, who could see that her last remark was not at all to his uncle's liking. "'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' We have now to decide how many we shall ask, and whom."

"All right," said Bob, "and then we shall be able to organise the transport and commissariat departments. We shall ask the Bellasis, don't you think?"

"I suppose so," replied Randle, though with a shade of hesitation in his voice. "They are rather stuck up and give themselves airs, it is true; but we are on friendly terms with them, and they are likely to take it amiss if we don't ask them."

"Yes, you had better ask them," observed Mr. Ryvington, gravely. "They are doing a splendid business, I am told, and I know they are rich. Old Joe left those lads very well off, and they know how to take care of it" (their fortune, Mr. Ryvington probably meant).

"Yes," said Randle; "he left his two sons more than £100,000, and his daughter only £15,000. I don't think that right."

"I differ from you there, Randle," said his uncle. "I look upon £15,000 as being a very handsome fortune for a girl."

"She was just as much Joe Bellasis's child as William or Henry, and she ought to have been left equal with them. Besides, they have the business, which is a fortune in itself."

"Anyhow," interposed Bob, rather irrelevantly, and perhaps somewhat more emphatically than the occasion required, "Flora Bellasis is a deuced fine girl."

"Robert!" exclaimed his mother, in a tone of horror, "what are you saying?" The poor lady entertained a shrewd suspicion that her second son had a weakness for the sex which might some day lead to unpleasant results, and she feared that the admiration he expressed for Miss Bellasis pointed to a possibility that she would have strongly deprecated; for, "fine" as the young lady in question undoubtedly was, Mrs. Ryvington did not look upon her as an eligible daughter-in-law.

"I don't care what you say, mother," returned Bob, rather sulkily, for he thought it was high time she ceased to treat him as a child, "she is a fine girl."

"And a haughty and a proud one," said Mrs. Ryvington. "She is not a girl I admire. 'Handsome is that handsome does.'"

"Do you know what the hands say about the Bellasis?" asked Randle, by way of putting a stop to this altercation.

"No; what do they say?"

"That old Joe was a rough casting, and his children want to pass themselves off as fine gold."

"Ah, ah," laughed Mr. Ryvington, "not bad, not at all bad. But it serves them right. What business have they to pretend to have a high pedigree, and try to persuade people that they come of an old stock? Very high, indeed, I should think. Why, old Joe's father was hanged for sheep-stealing, wasn't he?"

"I believe there is a tradition of that sort," said Randle, "but I rather think it was a case of manslaughter and transportation beyond the seas; and maybe, after all, the story is a pure invention. However, it is no business of ours. The only fault I find with the Bellasis is their trying to ignore that which constitutes their chief, if not their only, claim to distinction and respect—the lowness of their origin. It is surely not less honourable to have for forefathers men who have won their bread by the work of their hands, than to belong to a family that has lived for generations on the labour of others. Will the time ever come, I wonder——"

"Don't you think it would be well to settle about the invitations, Randle? Perhaps there is somebody you might like to ask," put in Mrs. Ryvington, who was apprehensive that if her son went on he might say something that would give his uncle as much offence as the repeater had given him pleasure, and so mar all the good effect she anticipated from a present which she regarded both as an investment and a peace-offering.

"Certainly," said Randle, gravely, but inwardly amused at this display of his mother's anxious watchfulness. "Is there anybody in particular you would like us to ask, uncle?"

"No, I don't think there is. It is Robert's party, you know. Had you not better leave the invitations to him?"

"In consultation with Dora," suggested Bob, with a smile. "It is too big a job for me to tackle alone, I think."

"Agreed," said Randle. "You and Dora form the invitation and organisation committee. Are you willing, Dora?"

"I shall be delighted, Cousin Randle, to give Bob every help in my power, and all the benefit of my experience," answered Dora, with mock seriousness.

"I am sure we are greatly indebted to you, Miss Ryvington," returned her cousin gravely. "And now, I think, we may consider this meeting adjourned until the day on which Bob becomes a man."

CHAPTER XX.

BOB'S BIRTHDAY.

THE sun rose auspiciously on Robert Ryvington's birthday, and the promise it gave of brilliant weather was justified by the event. The guests numbered more than a score, without reckoning the people from Deepdene and Redscar. The first vehicle to leave was a large waggonette, drawn by four horses, in which rode Robert and most of the maiden and bachelor members of the party. The rear was brought up by carriages, which were chiefly affected by the married and middle-aged. Randle Ryvington of Deepdene, who looked upon the whole proceeding as being somewhat beneath him, and accepted his cousin's invitation only out of deference to the paternal wish, had chosen to drive his own drag, and was accompanied by his particular friends, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Cliviger. Not caring to be publicly identified with what he rather scornfully described to the lady and gentleman aforesaid as a juvenile picnic, he did not leave Deepdene until the others were well on the road.

In the waggonette that led the van there rode, besides Robert and Randle, Dora, Miss Flora Bellasis, her brother William, and five or six others.

Flora fully answered to Bob's description of her as a fine girl. Though rather tall, she was exceedingly well proportioned, and her dark hair and eyebrows, brilliant complexion, and regular, if somewhat too heavy, features would almost have rendered her worthy to be called beautiful if she had not posed as a beauty, and sought by every petty artifice of which she was mistress to call attention to her charms. Although the criticism she thus challenged was not always favourable to her claims, she had many admirers among the young men of Whitebrook; but the one she most desired to captivate, Red Ryvington, had hitherto shown an insensibility to her attentions as provoking as it was incomprehensible. As for Bob, she looked upon him as a boy; but as it was easy to see that he admired her, a sentiment that, with time, might not improbably develop into something warmer, she judiciously decided to give the young fellow a little encouragement, to keep him in hand, as it were, so that, if the elder brother should fail her, there might be somebody else to fall back upon. It must not, however, be supposed that Miss Bellasis was a mere man-hunter, for as she one day confided to her friend, Mrs. Tom Cliviger, she could have had half-a-dozen offers any day by lifting up her little finger. But she fully believed in the Bellasis pedigree, and had made up her mind that the Ryvington

family was the only family in Whitebrook into which it would not be beneath her to marry.

William Bellasis was a gay young bachelor of forty, heavy as to build and stolid as to countenance. The greatest of his minor troubles was the bigness of his hands, a peculiarity which he probably inherited from his iron-working ancestors, and which he sought to minimise by wearing the tightest-fitting gloves he could thrust his fingers into. He affected, moreover, an airiness of attire, particularly in the matter of neckties, which were often of gorgeous hue, that, together with a habit he had of sporting a bright flower in his button-hole, had procured for him among the Whitebrook people the name of "Blooming Bill."

Notwithstanding his foibles, William Bellasis was an acute man of business and a shrewd politician. He was chairman of the Whitebrook Conservative Committee, and his powers of organisation were highly thought of by his party.

Whitebrook men never come together, however sad, solemn, or festive may be the occasion of their meeting, without talking shop, and the waggonette was hardly under weigh when Blooming Bill introduced the topic that was ever uppermost in his mind by asking Randle if he had anything fresh in business. Randle answered in the negative, and gave his gossip the opening he desired by inquiring in turn if he had anything new.

"Only that there's trouble brewing among the hands," said the other; "they're getting confoundedly uppish, that's what they are. I've just had a rumpus with our chaps, and had to give in too."

"Indeed! How was that?"

"Well, you see, we've got some rather good contracts lately. We've one for ten locomotives from Australia; we are making a pair of fifties for Riser's new factory, and we are fitting the Blackmoor colliery up with new engines and pumping gear. One way and another we've jobs on hand that will keep us busy for six or eight months. Well, the beggars got wind of this, and last Saturday they sent a deputation to my brother and me to say that if we did not give them an advance of five per cent. all round they'd knock off work. I told them at first to go to the devil; but when we came to talk it over it was plain to see that there was nothing for it but submission. We could not afford a turn-out—that's the plain truth—so we just gave them what they asked for. But it was a very unfair thing to do, and I shall not soon forget it. If hands take advantage that way, it will be impossible soon to do any business at all."

"Upon my word, Bellasis," said Randle, "I don't see that you have much cause for complaint. You got off very cheaply; the men might have asked ten per cent., you know."

"What! Mr. Ryvington! You, an employer of labour, think that hands are justified in taking advantage of their masters being under contract?"

"Why not?"

It was clear from the bewilderment expressed in Mr. Belasis's countenance that this question had never before either occurred or been put to him. In disputes between masters and men he always assumed that the masters were in the right, or, conversely, that the hands were in the wrong, and he had not believed it possible that there could be any difference of opinion as to the recent conduct of his own workpeople. Nevertheless, being somewhat slow of utterance, and not very quick of thought, he did not find it very easy to answer Randle's question.

"Because," he said, after a rather long pause, "it is not right. I mean it is not right to take an unfair advantage."

"There I quite agree with you. But I don't see that your men were taking an unfair advantage. Political economists are never tired of telling us that labour is a commodity, the price of which is regulated by supply and demand, and the cost of living. Hence your men, having something to sell—to wit, their labour—have the same right to sell it to the best advantage, as you have to sell your engines for the utmost you can obtain. You have pressing need of their services for the next few months, and they, in the exercise of their strict right, profit by the circumstance to demand a higher price for their labour."

"That is all very well, Ryvington, as to theory; but come to practice. How can I ever take a contract again if I know that the day it comes to their knowledge the beggars will be down on me for a rise?"

"How do you secure yourself against a rise in the price of iron when you make a contract for engines?"

"By making a contract for iron at the lowest prices of the day."

"Why not adopt a similar course with your men?"

"Why, if I did that I should never be able to take a contract without asking their leave. Nay, by Jingo!"

"You may call it asking their leave if you like. I should call it making a bargain. It seems to me a very easy matter to call your people together, tell them you are tendering for some large contracts, and inquire if, in the event of your obtaining them, they will agree to work until their completion at whatever wages you can afford to give them."

"Nay, by Jingo, we have not come to that yet. I'd rather take my chance."

"Very good. But then you must not complain if your men,

knowing that you are busy, and have need of them, profit by the opportunity to ask a higher price for their services."

"It is all very fine talking, Ryvington," replied Blooming Bill, whose strong point was not readiness of reply, "but just wait a bit until the shoe pinches you, and then we shall hear what you will say. And it will pinch you, take my word for it, and soon. There's going to be a big turnout at Ribbleton, and the factory hands at Whitebrook are deuced fractious; at any rate, they are at our Nova Zembla mill."

"Yes, I have heard there is trouble brewing at Ribbleton, but I fancy we shall escape it at Redscar. We hardly consider ourselves as belonging to Whitebrook, you know. But it is not wise to meet troubles half-way; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

"Come, now, I like that, Randle," put in Bob, with a serio-comic air. "'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof'—the day being my birthday. I suppose you and Mr. Bellasis consider the whole thing a bore. A nice compliment to the ladies, 'pon my word. Did you hear what my brother was saying just now, Miss Bellasis? 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' A pleasant sentiment for a fellow to hear the day he comes of age, isn't it?"

"We were not talking about you, Bob; we were discussing business," replied Randle, with a smile.

"That I can well believe," said Miss Bellasis, sarcastically, as she adjusted one of her bracelets on her shapely arm; "my brother talks business everywhere, in season and out of season. It is business at our house, morning, noon, and night. I wish with all my heart there was no business. You are very fortunate, Miss Ryvington" (turning to Dora), "in not having any brothers in business."

"I am not very sure about that," returned Dora. "I rather think my brother finds having nothing to do hard work sometimes. Depend upon it, Miss Bellasis, if your brothers were out of business, and did not take to some other occupation, you would have far more cause for complaint than you have now."

"You are of my opinion, I can see, Miss Ryvington—that every man ought to have some occupation," observed Bellasis.

"A hobby sometimes answers as well," said Randle.

"Exactly, because it provides a man with occupation. And, as for business, I daresay we do become too much absorbed in it sometimes. And my brother and I have often matters to talk over at home that we have not time to talk over at the works. But you should not say anything against business, Flora. It has made us what we are."

"It has helped to retrieve the family fortunes, I know," said

the young lady proudly; "but the Bellasis were not always in trade, as I daresay you are aware, Miss Ryvington. If Bertram Bellasis of Bowland had not joined Prince Charlie in 1745, and lost all his property, my brothers would not be making engines and boilers at Whitebrook now."

"Well, I am sure we are all greatly indebted to Bertram Bellasis of Bowland," said Bob gravely. "You see but for him we should not have had the pleasure of your acquaintance, nor of your company to-day. Your misfortune has been our gain, Miss Bellasis."

"It is really very kind of you to say so, I am sure," returned Flora, with a gratified smile. "Still, you know, I cannot help feeling sorry that our ancestor was so unfortunate. But it is some little consolation to know that he did not lose his estates by gambling or speculation, or anything of that sort, but by his devotion to a great cause. How many acres were forfeited to the Crown, William?"

"I do not justly remember—several thousands, I think," answered William, with a large vagueness becoming the subject and the occasion; and there flitted across his face the suspicion of a smile, which suggested to Robert Ryvington, who was rather quick at drawing inferences, the idea that Flora's implicit faith in Peter Wiswell's version of the family history might possibly not be quite so implicitly shared by her brother.

"He must have had a fine property, this Bertram Bellasis; and it was in a fine country too. Whereabouts in Bowland was it, did you say?" asked Bob, with an appearance of great interest.

"Well, you know," said Blooming Bill, "on that point the family history is just a little obscure—some of the records lost and that, you know. But I don't think the property was exactly in a ring fence. There were several estates, in different parts of the West Riding, and some in Lancashire. This Bertram Bellasis my sister has been speaking of lived in the neighbourhood of Bolton, I believe; that is where my father came from. The house he lived in was burnt down ages ago. But it is really too bad to inflict all these details upon you. You must find them very tiresome."

"Not at all; I find them very interesting, I assure you. I think the history of old families is one of the most fascinating of studies. You have, of course, paid many visits to the cradle of your race, Miss Bellasis?"

"I am ashamed to say I have never been there once, Mr. Robert. I have often asked my brothers to take me, but they are always too busy; and then, until just lately, I have been almost always at school."

"Well, then I will tell you what we will do," said Bob, with the eagerness of a man who conceives a brilliant idea. "You *must* see Bolton, you know. It is not far from Chatburn; we are well before the others; we have four good horses; we will drive to Bolton, take a look at the church, perhaps stroll a few minutes in the park, and get back in time for the banquet. What do you say?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Robert," exclaimed the young lady, whom the proposition seemed greatly to delight. "It will be so awfully nice—don't you think so, William? I want so much to see Bolton."

"What's that you were saying about a banquet, Mr. Robert?" asked William, ignoring his sister's question, from which Bob rightly inferred that he did not much care about going to Bolton.

"Oh," said Bob, carelessly, "I call it a banquet because I do not know what else to call it. Three o'clock—that is the time fixed, you know—is either too early or too late for dinner, and the wrong time for luncheon. It seemed to require a name out of the common, so I called it a banquet. Perhaps, though, banquet sounds rather too swell, but I don't know any better word."

"Refection," suggested Dora.

"Yes, refection is, perhaps, better; but if we could find a word between refection and banquet it would be better still. Can you, Dora?"

Dora had to admit that she could think of no middle term between refection, which signifies a light meal, and banquet, which signifies a rich repast.

"Well, never mind," Bob went on; "we will call it refection, then. It will not be grand and rich, but good and substantial, as becomes a country inn. Now look here, this is the programme. After the refection we—that is, those of us that are so disposed—inspect the ruins of the abbey or wander by the banks of the Ribble for an hour or two. Then we return to the inn and have some music, and perhaps a little dancing in the cool of the evening, and drive home by moonlight."

"Oh, how nice!" exclaimed several young ladies in chorus. "But where will the music come from?"

"That is all in perfect order," answered Bob, with business-like precision. "I have arranged everything. There is a very fair piano at the inn, which I have had tuned expressly for the occasion. A musician is coming from Whitebrook to work it. He brings with him a clever lady harpist and her harp, and a blind man who plays divinely on the harmonium."

"Oh, how awfully nice!" exclaimed the chorus of young ladies.

CHAPTER XXI.

MISS BELLASIS HEARS SOMETHING ABOUT HER ANCESTORS.

"LOOK there, Dora," exclaimed Randle, as the party in the waggonette sighted Salley. "See the bright river winding past the ivy-clad, weird-looking ruins of the old abbey—the green pastures and yellow corn-fields, with the background of dark wood towards Bolton Hall. Is it not as beautiful as anything ever seen in Switzerland? And those whitewashed cottages, are they not as picturesque as Swiss chalets?"

"At any rate they suit the landscape better, and they have the quality of cleanness, which Swiss chalets do not always possess. I do not know how it is, but in Switzerland, I think, no place can compare with it; yet when I return to England, it seems—where it is not scarred by coalpits and made hideous by long chimneys—the most beautiful country in the world. How do you explain the contradiction? is it natural prejudice?"

"Well, I suppose we are all more or less prejudiced in favour of our native land, though that would not, of course, account for preference for Switzerland. Perhaps latest impressions are the strongest. In order to make a fair comparison, it would be necessary to have the most characteristic features of English and Swiss scenery side by side, and look at them together. My own idea is, that while Swiss scenery is unquestionably the finer, our English scenery is the more beautiful. There is nothing in England to compare in grandeur with the Furca Pass, the gorge of the Reuss, or the lake of the four cantons—to say nothing of the Alps; and then there is nothing in Switzerland to equal the rich beauty of this part of the valley of the Ribble, and many another spot in what Shakespeare calls this precious stone set in a silver sea."

"And demi-paradise!" put in Bob. "It might be, perhaps, if it were not quite so muggy at times, and had a better climate of its own."

"And a little more sunshine," suggested Dora, "and a loftier sky, and not quite so much rain."

"I am not sure about that," returned Randle, who seemed, as Bob whispered to Dora, to be in an unusually patriotic mood. "The low sky you speak of is much more favourable to enjoyment than eternally blue skies and glaring sunshine. It mellows the landscape, too, keeps the grass green, and fills the streams. If we had a continental climate, all those fields and meadows would be burnt brown, and the country robbed of more than half its beauty, and ourselves of more than half our energy. Our

climate has its faults, but I don't know any other that I would like to exchange it for. It gives us the finest horses, the most beautiful women, and the most laborious working people in the world."

"Bravo, Ryvington, you express my sentiments to a T," exclaimed Blooming Bill, whom this laudation of the British climate greatly pleased. "But here we are at Salley. Do you mean to drive on without stopping, Robert?"

"Oh, dear, no; we must stop a few minutes, and let the horses have some meal and water."

"Well, then, I shall get out and wait here until you come back."

"What! won't you go on to Bolton with us?"

"No, thank you. I have been to Bolton several times before. I would rather stroll about here, and go over the ruins of the abbey."

"As you like, we shall be back in an hour or so."

Before Bellasis alighted from the waggonette, he whispered a few words to his sister, to which the only reply she vouchsafed him was a negative and almost angry gesture.

The arrival of a carriage and four at the quiet village of Bolton naturally caused somewhat of a sensation, and a crowd of gossips and sightseers quickly gathered near the church gate, where the waggonette was brought to a stand. All the party alighted and entered the quaint old building. The object that attracted the most attention was the curious monument of Sir Ralph Pudsay (the faithful follower of Henry VI., who sheltered that unfortunate monarch at Bolton Hall after the disastrous battle of Hexham), with the effigies of his three wives and twenty-five children.

"I don't see any of the Bellasis amongst them; do you?" whispered Flora to Bob, by which she probably meant to intimate that she did not see the name of Bellasis recorded anywhere in the church.

"Nor I," answered Bob, with becoming gravity, "but they have perhaps got rubbed out; they are so old, you know."

"Yes, I daresay that is the reason. I wonder if my ancestors were much respected in the neighbourhood."

"Not a doubt of it, I should say. Perhaps you would like to ask? I see there are some very old people near the church gate, there. Shall I inquire if the name is still remembered hereabouts?"

"Thank you, Mr. Robert, if it would not be too much trouble. I am so anxious to learn all I can about our family, and it is so interesting to be in the place where they lived so long."

As they crossed the road towards the park, Bob exchanged a

few words with an aged villager, and presented him with a shilling, whereupon the old fellow gave a grin of delight, muttered something which Bob did not quite understand, and hobbled off.

"Confound the old beggar," muttered Robert, "he has taken me in. He knows nothing."

They did not linger long among the stately elms and ancient oaks of Bolton Park. The time when they had promised to be back at Salley was nearly up, and after one glimpse at the grey old house, so rich in historic memories, they returned to the village.

As Robert, who was walking with Flora, crossed the road a second time, he was accosted by an ancient woman. She could not have been less than eighty, and might have been a hundred, yet though bent and shrivelled and white-haired, her eyes were not dim, and she seemed sharp of hearing and quick of speech.

"Which on yo," she inquired, with a look directed at Robert, "has been axing if onybody here knew aught o' th' Bellowsis?"

"Bellowsis! That must be the local pronunciation of Bellasis," observed Flora, for she did not remember her father, and the alteration of the name occurred before she was born.

"Yes, I was asking, on behalf of this young lady, who is a Bellasis," said Robert. "Her father came from somewhere hereabouts, I think."

"Oh, shoo's one o' th' Bellowsis, is shoo? Father's name was Joseph, worn't it?"

"Yes, my papa was Mr. Joseph Bellasis," answered Miss Bellasis, haughtily, and with a strong emphasis on the "Mr.," as if to intimate to the old body that her manner was vastly too familiar.

"Ay, ay," returned the ancient woman, dreamily. "I knew Joseph Bellows weel, if ever onybody dud. But that wasn't th' name as he went by i' these pairts, though I allus called him Joseph mysen. He went by th' name o' Joe o' Fat Sam's i' this country. Ay, ay, him and me should ha' been wed! and if we had been, who knows, my bonny wench——"

"Woman, you lie!" exclaimed Flora, who was beside herself with rage, and trembling lest the woman should say something still more unpleasant, for the rest of the party had now come up, and many of the villagers were within earshot. "What do you mean by insulting me in this way? My father could never have been married to the like of you."

"Oh, couldn't he?" said the old woman, quietly, but with an angry twinkle in her dark eyes. "It was t'other way about. I couldn't be wed to him. Do you know, my proud young lady, why my mother wouldn't let me be wed to him as you call Mr. Joseph Bellasis? It was because his father was sent to Botany

Bay for killing Black Ned, fra Slaidburn; and if he hadn't been worse for drink when he dud it, and Ned hadn't provoked him, he'd ha' swung for it: I seed your grandfather, wi' my own een, marched down this here road between two constables, wi' gyves on his wrists, my braw Miss Bellasis."

"It is not true, it cannot be true," exclaimed Flora, passionately. "You are a wicked, wretched old woman to tell such untruths. I will have you punished—put in prison—that I will. Do let us go; please take me away, Mr. Robert."

As Robert led her to the carriage, she burst into a flood of tears, which he greatly feared might be the forerunner of a fit of hysterics; but he had under-estimated the young lady's power of self-control, and before they were well out of sight of Bolton she was sufficiently composed to ask him if he could imagine what had induced that wicked old woman to say such terrible things.

"I really cannot tell," answered Bob, hesitatingly, "unless it was that you said she lied. That made her mad, I expect."

"But she did lie, didn't she? You don't think for one moment, Mr. Robert, that what she said was true?"

Seeing that Bob believed every word of the old woman's story, and was moreover rather "spoons" on Miss Bellasis, this was a sufficiently embarrassing question. But he was a youth of resource, and, by simply saying "Impossible," came happily out of the difficulty.

This answer seemed to give the young lady great satisfaction.

"Impossible, indeed," she exclaimed. "Impossible and preposterous. But can nothing be done to her—cannot she be punished for telling such untruths? Is there no law against defamation of character?"

"Not, I am afraid, against defaming the character of one's grandfather."

This was an unfortunate answer.

"And do you really believe, Mr. Robert," exclaimed Flora, her voice trembling with indignation, "that the wretched convict this miserable woman spoke of was really my grandfather? Don't you see that there is some dreadful mistake, or that the malignant creature made it all out of her own head, just to annoy me?"

"Exactly, exactly. Yes, of course, decidedly," replied Bob, in some confusion. "And that, you see" (briskly, as if struck by a happy thought) "makes it all the more difficult to do anything, for if you could not punish her for slandering your own grandfather, it stands to reason that you could not punish her for slandering some other body's grandfather."

"Still, I should like," said Miss Bellasis, vindictively, "I should like to do something at that old woman, and at those

Bolton people too, for I saw some of them laughing, and they looked as if they believed her. I will certainly speak to my brother about it the moment we get to Chatburn. I wish he had been here."

"By all means; that is decidedly the best thing you can do. Yes, it was a pity he did not come," said Bob, who felt, however, by no means sure that when Blooming Bill heard what had come to pass he would be of the same opinion, nor that apprehension of some such fiasco as had actually occurred was not his motive for staying behind.

When, a few minutes later, they arrived at Salley, they found that the remainder of the party had been waiting for them half-an-hour or more, and that the repast which Robert had described as being something between a confection and a banquet was ready to be served.

"Well, how did you like Bolton-by-Bowland?" asked William Bellasis of his sister, as they walked toward the inn.

"Not at all," answered Flora, with an angry toss of her head. "It's nothing but a common little village, and I was grossly insulted by a wretched old woman—I may say by all the people of the village, for they evidently sympathised with her."

"Well, I wanted you not to go, you know. Who was this old woman, and what did she say?"

What else passed between the brother and sister was never exactly known; but, as Robert Ryvington remarked that Miss Bellasis did not refer again to the unpleasant incident at Bolton, and that she rarely thereafter spoke of her family, or boasted of her distinguished ancestry, he drew the conclusion that she had profited by the lesson he had been the unwitting means of giving her

CHAPTER XXII.

PUDSAY'S LEAP.

SAVE that the viands composing it were cold, the repast that Robert had provided for his guests deserved better the description applied to it by himself than by the word which his cousin had suggested. As touching abundance and variety the meal was rather a banquet than a refection. A splendid Ribble salmon reposed at one end of the table, a magnificent sirloin of beef adorned the other. These lords of the larder were reinforced by an appetising array of side dishes, such as roast capons, boned turkeys, ox tongues, Strasburg pies, and cold hams, over which

a small army of bottles, headed by a large contingent of gold-helmeted champagne flasks, stood guard.

As Robert, who had occasionally shrewd ideas, albeit he did not always act shrewdly, explained to his guests, he had thought it well to order such a meal as they saw before them, rather than a regulation dinner, for several reasons. In the first place, the day was warm, and hot dishes, he opined, did not go well with hot weather. Then, the house being only a country inn, he did not want to put too great a strain upon its resources; and last, though not least, as the excursion partook somewhat of a picnic character, it seemed in accordance with the fitness of things that their principal repast should be as little formal as was compatible with comfort.

This explanation was received with warm approval. Everybody applauded Robert's idea, the ladies one and all declaring that a cold collation was greatly to be preferred to a warm dinner, which would have taken up much time which might be used to better purpose than eating.

Bob, who was in such excellent humour that he had forgotten all his grudges against his uncle, requested Mr. Ryvington to take the head of the table, and, although the old gentleman made a show of resistance on the ground that the place was properly his nephew's, he ended by accepting the honour and carving the sirloin, while Robert took the second place and served out the salmon.

Notwithstanding the drinking of a few toasts, the refection was soon over. The principal health drunk was of course that of the hero of the day, proposed by Mr. Ryvington, who described his nephew as "an honour to our ancient family and a very promising young man." Bob blushed, but replied with a point and discretion that surprised many who heard him. When Tom Cliviger proposed the married ladies, and expressed a hope that both Mr. Robert Ryvington and his brother would before long "enter the land of Uz" (by which he was understood to signify the holy state of matrimony), Bob blushed again and stole a sly glance at Flora Bellasis, to whom a few glasses of Moët and Chandon had restored the equanimity which the old woman at Bolton had so rudely disturbed. He fancied that she blushed too, and felt flattered and gratified thereat; but seeing that she had just drunk the greater part of a glass of champagne he may possibly have been mistaken in connecting the young lady's seeming emotion with Mr. Cliviger's witty and suggestive Biblical allusion.

When the toast-drinking came to an end the younger ladies withdrew to equip themselves for the proposed walk, and so soon as they were ready were joined by most of the gentlemen. A

few, however, among whom were Mr. Ryvington and his son, Tom Cliviger and William Bellasis, preferred to stay where they were, and round off the repast with brandy and water and cigars.

After a stroll through the ruins of the abbey, where Mrs. Ryvington and Mrs. Ford (Mr. Ryvington's sister-in-law and housekeeper), and a few more of the old and middle-aged signified their intention of remaining until the young folks should return from their walk, the pedestrians set out on their excursion.

The walk chosen by Robert led by the riverside, through fat pastures and green meadows, in which scores of beautifully-marked and heavily-uddered cows were feeding on the rich grass for which Craven is so famous. The stream, broad, shallow, and bright, was bordered by a row of gnarled old thorns, of age so great that they must have outlived many generations of men. Round some of them, as if seeking the protection of their strength, clung the tender, sweet-scented honeysuckle; and prompted, perhaps, by a kindred feeling, the wild white rose had mingled its pale petals with their dark green leaves. Farther on, the valley takes the form of an amphitheatre, the sides of which are clothed with shady woods. The turrets of Bolton are visible in the distance, and old Pendle, his rugged outlines softened by a silvery haze, beams benignantly on the scene.

Among the foremost group of saunterers were Randle, Robert, Dora, Miss Bellasis, and several others, but these gradually fell behind, some to gather wild flowers, others to lie on the grass and listen to the music of the river, others again to take a line of their own; for Bob had declared liberty to be the watchword of the day, and that everyone was free to follow his own fancy.

The brothers were not far from each other, but it somehow came to pass, rather to Robert's disappointment, that the elder paired off with Miss Bellasis, the younger with Dora; and in this order they strolled until they came to a picturesque part of the river known as Rainsber Scar, or Pudsay's Leap.

The Scar is a tall cliff, crowned with noble trees, and mantled with ferns, mosses, and clustering ivy. At its base flows the yet limpid Ribble—soon, alas, to be polluted with unspeakable abominations—mingling its silvery voice with the "wood-notes wild" of the feathery denizens of the vale.

"Let us sit down here," said Randle; "we shall hardly find a lovelier spot to while away a few minutes in, I think."

The proposal was received with acclamation, and the four seated themselves on the trunk of a fallen elm, not far from the edge of the stream.

"Well, what say you to this, Dora?" continued her cousin,

directing her attention by a look to the rustling trees as they bent graciously over the Scar, the gliding river, and the rich emerald of the grass, spangled with cowslips and wild hyacinths. "Did you ever see the marrow of it in Switzerland?"

"Your thoughts seem to be running a great deal on Switzerland just now, Randle. Why are you so wishful to know my opinion on the comparative merits of English and Swiss scenery? What does it matter which I prefer? Besides, I have told you already."

"Yes, I know your general views, but it is well sometimes to descend from generals to particulars. It seems to me that the scenery hereabouts cannot be matched out of England, and I was curious to know if you thought the same."

"It is certainly very beautiful, but I think I could find the marrow of it, as you say, in the Jura; and in the Jura, moreover, there is hardly a stream, a well, or a mountain that is not consecrated by some quaint or graceful legend, and legends always seem to add to the interest of a place, to throw a glamour over it, as it were, and to heighten the beauty of nature by the charm of association."

"Well, there is a legend about this place. My brother has been here before, he knows all about it. Can you tell us the story of Pudsay's Leap, Bob?"

"I daresay I can, especially as there is very little to tell. William Pudsay, who was the owner of Bolton Hall some time in the sixteenth century, had a lead-mine at Remington-in-Craven. Whether he was a clever metallurgist, and hit upon a method of extracting the silver that lead ore almost invariably contains, or he found a vein of the nobler metal in some other form, nobody knows. Anyhow, as the story runs, silver he got and coined into shillings. And although these shillings were good—better probably than the coin of the realm then current—coining was and is still a royal prerogative, and nobody had a right to make money, save by leave of the sovereign, at that time Queen Bess; who, moreover, by an old law of the realm was seized of all the gold and silver mines in the kingdom. Thus Mr. Pudsay committed a double crime. He appropriated the Queen's silver and illegally stamped it with Her Majesty's image and superscription. When this came to the old lady's ears, as it did in course of time, for Pudsay flooded all Yorkshire and Lancashire with his shillings, she was mighty wroth, and sent off a pursuivant and a *posse*—I think that is the right word—of men-at-arms to catch him and bring him up to London. But our friend William did not believe in being caught. When he heard the men-at-arms come clattering up the avenue he knew that his little game was up, and made up his mind from Bolton

to bolt. Calling for his seven-league boots—I mean for his horse, Wanton Grey, which always stood ready saddled in the stable—he jumped on its back, and at the very moment the pursuivant was hammering with his sword-hilt at the front door, and demanding admittance in the Queen's name, Pudsay galloped off towards Rainsber Scar, leaped clean over it down into the river there, and got clear away. And of all the Queen's horses, and of all the Queen's men, there was neither steed nor rider that dared to follow him. The place has been called 'Pudsay's Leap' ever since.

"A rare jump, wasn't it?" added Robert, looking up at the cliff; "a hundred feet, if it was an inch."

"I don't believe it," exclaimed Miss Bellasis. "Why, the man would have been killed."

"Ah, but you don't know. You have not read the ballad. Here it is" (taking a book from his pocket). "This contains the true version, I think; but we must not criticise legends too narrowly, you know. Do you criticise your Swiss legends, Dora?"

"Oh, dear, no. We accept them in faith."

"Exactly. That is the right thing to do; it is what I do myself. Well, according to this poetic version, William Pudsay was a very popular gentleman hereabouts, 'loved and honoured by every degree,' and a special favourite with the denizens of the nether world, two of whom, Lob and Michel, invited him one moonlight night to revel in Aithera Hoile, a cave up in the woods yonder, and—

"They gave him there a magical bit,
The strangest thing you ever could see,
And charged him aye to remember it,
If ever he chanced to be forced to flee;

"For it would nourish a drooping horse
From evening red to morning grey,
And help him by its magical force
To gallop away for the live-long day."

"I wish I had a bridle like that," said Bob, looking up; "a fellow might ride the same horse to hounds every day of the week, and always be in the first flight. It would save a mint of money in horseflesh, a bridle like that would."

"Well, you must emulate the example of William Pudsay; try to be a popular gentleman, and make friends with Lob and Michel," said Dora.

"You think it is all true, then, Miss Ryvington," exclaimed Miss Bellasis, "and that this Mr. Pudsay had really a magical bridle!"

"I believe every word of it," observed Robert, "only I am afraid that Lob and Michel haunt the woods of Bolton no more. The shriek of the railway whistle, if nothing else, would be enough to scare them away; and I daresay, if the truth were known, they went out long before railways came in."

"Does the ballad say nothing else?" asked Flora.

"Oh, yes, lots; but I do not think you would care to hear it all read. It tells how he made his money, 'thinking no ill;' how he escaped, and how—

"Out of the gates himself he flung,
Rainsber Scaur before him lay;
Now for a leap, or I shall be hung,
Now for a leap, quoth brave Pudsay!

"If of death I must meet the shock,
Since it may no other be,
Better a leap from my own good rock,
Than from a ladder at York, quoth he.

"Into his steed he drove the spur,
Fearfully did he snort and neigh;
Yet, though at first he was hard to stir,
Over the Scaur sprung Wanton Grey."

"The last verse seems rather mixed, though, don't you think?" remarked Bob, with an interrogative look. "Which of them was it that did so fearfully snort and neigh—the rider or his horse?"

"The horse, of course. How could the rider snort and neigh? Why, you were talking only two or three minutes since as if it were almost sacrilege to criticise a legend, and here you are the first to find fault! I am surprised, Bob."

"Permit me to observe, Miss Ryvington, that I was criticising, not the legend, but the wording of this ballad, which, being quite modern, has nothing sacred about it. I daresay, as you seem to think, the writer does mean that it was Wanton Grey who snorted and neighed, though he might have been a little more precise; and a jump like you is quite enough to make any man snort, and, if not neigh, at any rate, say 'nay.'"

"Bob, you are becoming insufferable," exclaimed Dora. "What a wretched pun! Have you no more of the ballad? What became of Pudsay after he leaped the Scar?"

"He galloped off to London as hard as he could go, to ask the Queen's pardon, found Her Majesty on board a ship in the Thames, threw himself on his knees before her, and being a good-looking chap, and her own godchild to boot, she let him off with a wiggling. As the ballad says—

“She gave him her hand to kiss;
 So, while the tear stood in his e’e,
 His heart was brought from bale to bliss,
 “But no more Pudsay shillings!” said she.”

“Is that all?” inquired Miss Bellasis.

“That is all,” answered Bob, putting the book in his pocket. “And now” (looking at his watch) “I think we had better be retracing our steps. I expect my musicians have arrived by this time, and I must see that the preparations for our dance are in proper train.”

“All right,” returned Randle, “you three go on. I will follow in a few minutes. There are some fine snap-dragons up there, which I would like to get.”

“I will wait for you, Cousin Randle,” said Dora, reseating herself on the fallen elm. “You two go on” (to Robert and Flora), “we will come presently.”

Miss Bellasis would have preferred a somewhat different arrangement, but not being of the family she acquiesced in the proposal with seeming alacrity, and went away with the younger brother in the direction of Chatburn.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A COUSINLY TALK.

WHILE Randle gathered his snap-dragons, Dora sat musing on her elm-tree.

Her cousin’s manner puzzled her. Though since her return home she had seen little of him, she fancied he was quieter and more taciturn than of yore; and if he did not seem less happy, he was decidedly less mirthful. Did the cause, she asked herself, lie in his increasing business responsibilities, or had it some connection with his adventure in the Furca Pass? Could disappointment at not hearing from the Avalons be the source of his melancholy? Was he, after all, as she had jestingly suggested at Villa Artemisia, in love with Lady Muriel? As for her own feelings towards Randle, they were complex and contradictory. She had a greater liking and respect for him than any man she knew, or was likely to know. If he had asked her to be his wife she would have said “yes,” without much hesitation. And yet, strange to say, she felt no jealousy of this great lady who, she began to suspect, had really stolen her cousin’s heart, albeit she felt indignant at what she deemed her ingratitude, and the ingratitude of her kindred, and deeply sorry that Randle’s noble

conduct should have brought him only vexation and an unquiet mind. That the disparity in rank between her cousin and Lord Lindisfarne's daughter—even if they should meet again, and all else were favourable—might prove a bar to their union, never so much as occurred to her. Dora's knowledge of the world was not very profound, and it seemed, she thought, only in accordance with the fitness of things that Randle's guerdon should be the hand of the girl who owed him her life, if he asked for it and she returned his love. Her only misgiving was lest, if they did marry, Lady Muriel might not make him happy. She was proud, of course—that went without saying—and, what would be much worse, she might be gay and frivolous, and always wanting to go to balls and parties; and Randle did not like balls and parties. He looked upon them, as she had heard him say, as necessary evils, and as involving a frightful waste of time.

It fell out that, when Dora had arrived at this stage of her reflections, she raised her head, a movement which chanced to coincide with Randle's descent from the bank where he had been botanising. The incident interrupted the flow of her thoughts, and suggested to her that she had, perhaps, been travelling a little too fast. She had omitted from her calculations the rather important consideration that Lady Muriel's family, so far from being eager to wed her to Randle, had never, since the parting at Brigue, condescended to acknowledge his existence. She possessed, moreover, no positive evidence that her cousin reciprocated the love which she had once ascribed to Lady Muriel. She might easily be mistaken, but the difficulty was easy of solution.

She would ask him. Her cousin and she had always been on good terms. He had ever treated her in a brotherly fashion, while her feeling for him was that of a sister for a favourite brother. She had no secrets from him, and she felt sure that he would make no difficulty in telling her whether he had lost his heart to Lady Muriel or not.

"I am glad we let the others go on, Randle," she said, so soon as he came back with his snap-dragons. "I want to have a talk with you. We have not had a talk since I came back, you know."

"Talk away then, Dora," answered her cousin, rather absently. "I am always glad to hear anything you have to say. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Talk away, indeed!" returned Dora, with all her wonted liveliness of manner. "It must be the other way about. I want you to talk to me. Have you nothing to tell me?"

"Nothing very particular, I think," replied Randle, seriously, as if he were trying to recall something that might interest her.

"Oh, yes, I have, though" (briskly, as if struck by a happy thought). "You remember Mary Waddington, that girl who was so badly hurt in our card-room, and whom you took so much interest in? You will be glad to know that she is quite recovered, and was married the other day to Dick-o'-Dolly's; a decent lad is Dick, and doing well."

"How provoking you are, Randle! Of course, I am glad to know that Mary Waddington is well, and happily married to Dick-o'-Dolly's. What a name, though! I suppose she will be Mrs. Dick-o'-Dolly's? But it is yourself I want to know about."

"What do you want to know about me, Dora, that you don't know already?" was Randle's somewhat ungracious answer.

"Well, first of all, is it true that Lord Lindisfarne has not written to you?"

"Quite true."

"What can be the cause, do you think?"

Randle shrugged his shoulders and walked a little faster.

"I really don't know, Dora, and I don't think I much care."

This answer, and the manner in which it was given, were so irreconcilable with the theory she had formed that it seemed hardly worth while to question him further; but, having started the subject, Dora felt that she ought to continue it, if only to express her sense of Lord Lindisfarne's conduct.

"But cannot you conjecture?" she said, after a short pause.

"The only ground on which I can account for Lord Lindisfarne's silence is that he wishes to drop the acquaintance. I am only a Lancashire cotton-spinner, you know, and he is a peer of the realm."

"Did you tell him you were a cotton-spinner?"

"I do not think I did. I said no more about myself than was necessary. It was rather an exciting time, and we were not long together. But I think he understood I was in business. I gave him my address, too, and he must know it is hardly possible for a man to live in a Lancashire manufacturing town and not be in business."

"But he promised he would write to you and name a time for you to go to Avalon Priory, did he not?"

"No. I don't call it a promise. It was merely an expression of his intention to do a certain thing. Circumstances, or further reflection, have caused him to change his intention, that is all."

"Still you must feel very much annoyed. You cannot help seeing that you have been treated in an unworthy manner. You

have rendered Lord Lindisfarne a priceless service—you saved his daughter's life—and yet, because you happen to be a cotton-spinner, he treats you with contumely. You may say what you like, Randle, I call it shabby in the extreme, and if you are not very much annoyed you ought to be."

"I do not say that I am not annoyed, Dora," said Randle, smiling at his cousin's vehemence, "yet less because Lord Lindisfarne has acted, as you say, shabbily, than that he has acted, as it seems to me, insincerely. I claim no credit for saving his daughter's life; I should have done just the same if she had been his coachman's daughter; and it was quite open to him to go on his way without taking further thought about me. But instead of that, he and the others showered thanks on me far beyond my deserts, treating me, during the short time we were together, almost as one of themselves, and pressed me to make them a long visit after their return to England. And I liked them. I had an idea that earls and 'ladies' were stiff and formal, if not high and mighty, in manner. But I am bound to say the Avalons were extremely pleasant and agreeable. Their kindness could hardly have been greater if I had been a member of the family. It seems now, though, that it was all put on. I suppose they forgot all about me before I was well out of sight. Yes, Dora, I am disappointed, or, rather, I was. I have given over thinking about it now."

"And Lady Muriel?"

"Lady Muriel. What about Lady Muriel?"

"You said she was so nice, you know."

"A little hypocrite, rather! I expect these people make it the study of their lives to be gracious and courtly. But it is all veneer. They are what my father would have called 'hollow.'"

"You don't care, then——"

Dora hesitated. It seemed absurd, after what Randle had said, to suggest that he might, after all, have a tender feeling for Lady Muriel Avalon. Perhaps if she had known of a certain bunch of forget-me-nots that her cousin kept hidden away in a private drawer at home she might have thought differently.

"I see what you are driving at, Dora," he went on, with a laugh. "You think, because I was instrumental in saving a girl's life, I ought to fall in love with her. That is the way in novels, perhaps; but novels are one thing, real life is another. You are too romantic, coz."

"And you are too matter-of-fact. It would have been so very nice, you know."

"Nice! to fall in love with a girl that I shall very likely

never see again, and who would not have me, or be allowed to have me, if I were to ask her. Besides, a lady with a handle to her name is not a right sort of wife for a plain manufacturer. But I think it is now my turn to ask you a question or two. Are you sure that nobody—no sturdy Switzer or fascinating Frenchman—has stolen your heart, Cousin Dora ? ”

“ I should just like to hear you put that question to Mademoiselle Vieutemps, Ran. She would resent the mere suggestion of such a possibility as a foul libel on her establishment. Nobody has stolen my heart yet, cousin, and that is a more straightforward answer than you gave me,” returned Dora, who had an uneasy sense of not having obtained quite all the information she desired.

“ What is the matter, I wonder ? Why, they are coming back.”

This seemingly irrelevant observation was caused by the appearance of Robert Ryvington and William Bellasis, who were making towards them—apparently in great haste—from the direction of Chatburn.

“ Why have you come back, Bob ? Nothing wrong, I hope,” said Randle when they met, as in a few minutes they did.

“ I am sorry to say there is,” answered Bob, who was evidently much agitated. “ There has been an accident.”

“ Nothing serious, I hope. Is anybody hurt ? ”

“ Yes, but not seriously—not fatally, I mean,” said Bob, looking earnestly at his cousin.

“ Is it my father or my brother ? ” asked Dora, with trembling lips. She had rightly interpreted Bob’s look.

“ Your father ; but I hope it is nothing very bad. He got knocked down by a brewer’s cart as he was crossing the road to the Abbey grounds.”

“ Was he run over ? ” asked Randle.

“ No, only thrown down by the shaft ; but the horses were going at a trot, and the fall was a bad one. He could not speak at first, but he seemed to be coming round a bit when we left.”

“ Is my brother there ? ” inquired Dora, faintly.

“ No, he went off for a doctor first thing. He thought it would be better than sending a messenger.”

“ Oh, this is terrible ! ” cried the poor girl, as the tears ran down her cheeks. “ And to happen on Robert’s birthday, too, when we were all so happy. It is terrible. Poor papa ! Let us go on, please, as fast as we can.”

“ Do not distress yourself, Dora,” said Randle, gently. “ It may not be so bad as you think. I do not gather from Bob that your father is very badly hurt—that he has any bones broken, for instance—has he, Bob ? ”

"I do not think so. Do you think he has, Mr. Bellasis?"

"I am sure not. I helped to carry him in. He is slightly cut about the head—scratched, rather—for the wounds are quite superficial. But he was stunned, you know, and I daresay rather badly shaken; that is the worst, so far as I am aware."

"You hear, Dora. Nothing worse than a bad shake. There is nothing to fear. I have no doubt that, with careful nursing, uncle will be all right again by to-morrow, or at any rate in a few days."

Notwithstanding this expression of confidence, Randle was not without fear that, to a man of his uncle's years and habits, the consequences of a "bad shake" might be very grave.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE RANDLE LESS.

AN excited, chattering crowd had gathered before the inn door. Everybody was telling everybody else how the mishap had come to pass, and there were naturally almost as many versions as individuals. The great point of contention was whether Mr. Ryvington had been knocked down by a brewer's cart or a butcher's van. One gossip averred that a railway lorry had done the mischief, another laid the blame on a carriage and pair. As to the extent and nature of Mr. Ryvington's injuries opinions were equally conflicting: some had it that his head was cut open, and that he had sustained a compound fracture of the thigh; others asserted that both arms were broken, one so badly that it would have to be amputated. The suggestion of a sceptical shoemaker that "t'owd gentlemon was nobbut in a bit of a faant," and that "a glass or two of brandy would bring him raand directly," was received with general indignation; and the rebuke of the clogger's wife (the originator of the compound fracture theory), that it was "the most unfeelingest saying as she had ever heard come out of a man's mouth," was warmly applauded.

When Dora and Randle appeared the clamour was instantly hushed, and as they walked swiftly towards the inn door all respectfully made way for them.

They found Mr. Ryvington in a room on the ground floor. He was lying on a sofa, with closed eyes; and his pallor, and the black court-plaister with which his cuts had been dressed, gave him a look so ghastly that Dora was almost startled into a scream. The rustle of her dress, or the creaking of the door,

attracted his attention, and he opened his eyes. When he saw Dora he smiled. This made him look more natural, and, recovering herself, she went forward and kissed him.

"Dear papa," she said, "I am so very, very sorry. Are you much hurt—have you pain?"

"A little, child; but perhaps when the doctor comes he will be able to do something for me. Kiss me again, dear."

This was so tenderly spoken that Dora could hardly restrain her tears.

"Can I do anything for you, papa dear?"

"I do not think you can, child. Your aunt" (looking towards Mrs. Ryvington, who was the only person in the room besides themselves) "is very kind, and has done all that was possible. I am pretty comfortable, thank you. But if you would leave Randle and me alone a few minutes I should be very glad."

As the door closed behind them the expression of cheerfulness which the stricken man had put on in his daughter's presence gave place to one of pain and misgiving.

"What is it, uncle?" said Randle, anxiously; "do you feel worse?"

"Not worse just now, but no better. I am done for this time, Randle, lad."

"Nonsense, uncle; you must not talk in that way. You will live many a year yet. You are only a little shook. You have no bones broken, you know."

"But I am afraid I have something broken here" (pressing his hand to his side). "I feel it; something tells me I am not long for this world. And I am not easy in my mind, Randle."

"Can I do anything for you, anything to make your mind easier?"

"Thank you kindly," said the old man, plaintively. "You were always good and kind, Randle. I only wish others were more like you. It is about my will, Randle. I fear much I have made a foolish will,—that it may lead to trouble, especially for Dora. It opens a man's eyes when he gets his death-stroke, as I have got mine."

"Not so bad as that, uncle, I hope. You must keep up your courage, you know. That is half the battle. We shall have the doctor here soon, and he will tell you that you are quite mistaken. But about this will; can it not be altered?"

"That is what I want to talk to you about. I want you to telegraph for Pleasington to come over by the first train; there may perhaps be time."

"Yes, uncle; I will go at once."

"Wait a minute. Don't tell anybody; above all, don't tell your cousin Randle. When Pleasington comes let him be shown

in here at once, and send everybody else out of the room. Till then, not a word. And, Randle, I have made you one of my executors. You will act, won't you?"

"Certainly, uncle, if it will give you any satisfaction."

"It will, it will. And if so be that—that this will cannot be altered, you will do your best for Dora. You will not let her be put upon in any way, I mean."

"I don't know altogether what you mean, uncle; but so far as it depends on me she shall not be put upon by anybody. Of that I give you my word. I will watch over her interests as if she were my own sister."

"Thank you, Randle; thank you. I wish my own lad had been more like you. But go and send that message to Pleasington. I acted against his advice in making my will as I did, but I would not heed him. I see now, though. It is not a right will, and may lead to trouble. But go—time presses—and send Dora and your mother here."

When the two women re-entered the room, Mr. Ryvington asked his daughter to sit beside him. Then he took her hand in his and closed his eyes. Mrs. Ryvington, who was an experienced nurse, noticed with alarm that his paleness had increased, and that his voice was weaker; but Dora thought that her father seemed more tranquil, and therefore better.

As Randle returned from despatching his telegram to the lawyer, a two-horse drag was driven at a fast trot to the inn door. His cousin had brought a doctor—a grey-haired old gentleman—who was at once conducted into the patient's room. His first proceeding, after asking a few questions, was to request the ladies to withdraw for a minute or two. Then, while the two Randles looked on, he made a careful examination of Mr. Ryvington's body and limbs.

"You are right," he said, when the inspection was over, turning to Deep Randle. "No bones are broken, nor is there much internal injury. It is a case in which a surgeon is almost powerless—one of nervous shock. We can look for cure only to time, good nursing, suitable diet, and perhaps a course of tonics. At present the quieter Mr. Ryvington can be kept the better."

"You do not think it would be safe to take him home, then?" asked Deep Randle.

The surgeon shook his head and looked very grave.

"Not at present, certainly," he said. "I think the ladies might come in now."

As Dora and Mrs. Ryvington returned, the doctor left the room, remarking, with a significant glance at the two Randles, that he would be back in a few minutes.

Both the young men followed him.

"Well," said Deep Randle, as soon as they were outside, "what is your opinion, doctor? Do you think there is any danger?"

"I am afraid there is considerable danger. Your father has a weak heart; the shock to the system has been very great; and—I always like to be plain in cases of this sort—if he does not rally very speedily you must prepare for the worst."

"But can nothing be done? Cannot you give him something?"

"I am going to do. We must try stimulants. But tell me first, please, what have been your father's habits. I mean has he taken much wine or spirits?"

"No, I do not think you can say he has taken much; that is, not too much. He drinks half a bottle of port, sometimes a whole one, with his dinner."

"And takes a nightcap, I suppose?"

"Yes, he generally takes a glass or two of brandy and water before going to bed."

"I feared so. Well, we can only do our best; but I should be doing wrong if I encouraged you to look for a favourable issue. But I must now return to my patient and give some instructions."

"This is terrible. I did not expect this. The doctor means that it is impossible for my father to get better—that he must die," said Deep Randle to his cousin.

He looked much distressed, as, indeed, he was; for although his own interest was always his first consideration, and he had often thought of the day when he should receive his inheritance and become master of Deepdene, contemplating the possibility of his father's demise with perfect equanimity, the stroke had come so unexpectedly that he felt completely unmanned. Now that he was about to lose his father, he recognised for the first time how much he owed him, how kind he had been, how he had schemed and striven to raise his family to a higher social position; and he remembered, not without remorse, that he had not always rendered him that respect which was his due—had openly sneered at his old-fashioned ways, his closeness in money matters, and even his educational deficiencies.

"Terrible indeed. I do not think the doctor expects him to live many hours," observed Red Randle, who was surprised at his cousin's evidently genuine emotion. He had not given him credit for so much feeling.

"Do you know anything about his will?" asked the other, after a short pause.

This was rather an embarrassing question. Randle disliked concealing the fact of his having sent for the lawyer; yet he did

not feel that it would be right to disobey his uncle's injunction to keep it from his cousin's knowledge. So he was constrained to do the thing he most disliked—dissemble.

"Only that he has made a will, and that I am to be one of the executors. I thought you knew all about it."

"Hardly so much as you know yourself. I was not aware, for instance, that you were to be one of the executors."

This was said with a slight tinge of bitterness, as if the news did not altogether please him. The first shock over, Deep Randle's grief was already giving place to an anxious curiosity as to the tenor of his father's testamentary dispositions.

"I was not aware myself until half an hour ago."

"Will you act?"

"That is a strange question at such a moment as this. I have no ambition that way, I assure you. An executorship is about the most thankless office a man can have. But I can give you an answer. I promised my uncle that I would act, and I shall keep my word."

"I do not think you will find the office a thankless one so far as Dora and I are concerned, Ran," said the other, to whom it had just occurred that, as his cousin was appointed and determined to act, it might be as well to keep on good terms with him. "And there will be very little to do. It will not be like winding up a manufacturer's business, you know. The principal thing will be the investment of my sister's fortune, and that, I make no doubt, is made a charge on the estate."

"That I know nothing about," returned Red Randle, coldly. "But don't you think our place just now is in your father's room? The doctor evidently thinks he may not survive the day."

"Yes, let us go," answered the other, annoyed as well at his cousin's rebuke as at his own failure to elicit information from him; for, in spite of his denial, he was convinced that Randle knew all about the will.

The surgeon's prognosis of the probable result of Mr. Ryvington's accident was realised even more speedily than he had anticipated. In less than an hour after his arrival, Mr. Ryvington passed away, so quietly and painlessly that Dora and the two Randles thought he had sunk into a deep sleep, and it was only when Mr. Thyme placed his hand on his patient's heart and said, "It is all over," that they knew their father and uncle was no more.

Amid the solemn silence that followed the surgeon's words, Dora bent reverently over the dead man's face and touched the cold forehead with her trembling lips. Then she knew that her father was gone from her for ever, that in this life they could

never meet again, and her heart seemed dead within her. In his lifetime she had not been blind to her father's faults. What child is? But at this solemn moment she remembered only that he was her father, and that he had loved her as she had loved him. And there fell upon her a foreboding that, as his death had brought her trouble, so it might bring her evil, and that the brightness of her young life would be buried in her father's grave.

Her brother, too, in that supreme moment, was conscious only that he had lost a father. Death for a while banished every thought of self. He forgot even that the event to which he had so long looked forward had at last come to pass, and that he was now master of Deepdene and £10,000 a year, with full liberty to shape his life according to his liking.

But this abnegation was not of long duration, and jealousy of his sister and cousin, and an uneasy doubt as to the provisions of the will, despite his father's assurances that they were in his favour, began speedily to assert themselves—doubts that were far from being allayed by an incident which occurred shortly after his father's demise. As he and the other Randle left the chamber of death they met Lawyer Pleasington, looking very hurried and disturbed.

"Am I in time?" he asked of Red Randle. "I started the moment I got your telegram. How is your uncle going on?"

"I am sorry to say my uncle died half an hour ago."

"Dear me, dear me, it's a thousand pities; but I set off the moment I received your telegram, and if there had not been a train on the point of starting I could not have got here for an hour or more."

"What telegram?" exclaimed Deep Randle, to whom this conversation was altogether enigmatical. "What does it all mean?"

"I telegraphed for Mr. Pleasington at your father's request," said the other. "He wanted him to make some alterations in his will, and he particularly desired that I should not mention the circumstance to anybody, not even to you."

"I——" began Deep Randle, angrily, and then, restrained doubtless by prudential considerations, he stopped short; but his look said as plainly as words could say, "I don't believe you."

"What alterations did he want to make, Mr. Pleasington?" he asked, after a short pause.

"That is more than I can tell you."

"Can you guess, then?"

"It is against my principles to guess, Mr. Randle."

"But his present will—you made it—is it all in order?"

"Perfectly."

"And valid?"

"Of course."

"What is its purport?"

"That I am not at liberty to say. But you will not have to restrain your curiosity long, Mr. Ryvington," said the lawyer, sarcastically, recognising for the first time the young man's accession to the headship of the family. "On the day your father is buried you will be fully enlightened."

This answer did not seem to give Deep Randle much satisfaction, and, after remarking that he had several pressing matters to attend to, he left Mr. Pleasington and his cousin to themselves.

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. RYVINGTON AND HER NIECE.

"IF it could only have been; if it could only have been; if even yet it might please the Lord to bring it about!" and then Mrs. Ryvington stopped short, as if afraid of going any further, or, perhaps to watch the effect of this rather enigmatical utterance on Dora, who, by her own wish, was staying at Redscar until after the funeral.

"If what could only have been, aunt?" asked Dora, with wondering eyes, still red with weeping.

"Oh, Dora, my love, it will be lonely for you in yon big house, all by yourself, for your brother will be often away, and your aunt Ford is not much company for one of your age. And if the estate is left to him, as I daresay it is, you may have no right to live there."

"You surely do not think Randle would turn me out of the house, aunt? And I am sure dear papa will have left us both alike. Am I not as much his child as my brother?"

"As far as that goes, yes; and I think parents should make no difference between one child and another. But everybody does not think so, and your poor father, I know, wanted to keep Deepdene in the family. He is almost sure to have entailed it, and, even you lived there for the present, Randle might marry, you know, and then what would you do?"

"Oh, aunt, you are too anxious. I cannot think about such things at present. I am sure poor papa will have arranged everything for the best; and he once told me that he had promised mamma to leave us both alike."

"If it could only have been; if it could only have been,"

exclaimed Mrs. Ryvington, again with a heavy sigh, and a look as dolorous as if she, not Dora, had been left an orphan.

"How mysterious you are, aunt," said Dora, smiling in spite of her sorrow. "If what could only have been?"

"If it might have pleased the Lord to make you one of us."

"But am I not one of you already? We are all Ryvingtons, you know," answered Dora, quite unable to conjecture what her aunt was driving at. "Tell me plainly what you mean, for I am sure I shall never guess."

"That if it might please the Lord in His goodness to bring you and my son Randle together the great wish of my life would be realised."

"Oh!"

For a few minutes nothing more was said. Mrs. Ryvington was watching anxiously for some indication of the effect of her words, while Dora seemed to be thinking how she should reply.

"Does—does Randle know of this?" she said at length.

"Not at all, Dora. He has not the least suspicion that I have any such wish. You may think it strange that I have chosen this time, when your poor dear father is lying dead, to moot such a matter to you. But it seemed to me, seeing that the Lord has taken away your only parent, that it might comfort you to look forward to having a house of your own, and living where your father and mother lived and you were born."

"You forget, aunt, that I have no right to look forward to any such thing. I have always looked upon Randle as a dear brother, and I am sure he has never thought of me in any other light than as a sister."

"But if so be——"

"You are mistaken, aunt, I am sure. Randle and I are brother and sister, and I do not think we shall ever be anything else. And" (hesitatingly) "it seems hardly right to discuss such a subject now. Let us talk about something else."

Mrs. Ryvington was far from being dissatisfied with this answer. The question was, as it were, left open, and Dora had said nothing to indicate that she would refuse Randle if Randle at some future time should ask her to be his wife. Meanwhile the matter had been laid before her. She could not help thinking about it if she would. Mrs. Ryvington knew, moreover, that when the heart is softened by a great sorrow, we crave more for sympathy, and are more thankful for any manifestation of it than at other times; and nothing could exceed the kindness and delicacy of Randle's attentions to his cousin since her bereavement, attentions which left as little doubt in his mother's mind that his love for Dora was more than the love of a brother, as that they were exceedingly grateful to the young lady herself.

As Mrs. Ryvington had told her niece, a marriage between her and Randle had long been one of her day-dreams. She honestly thought they were well suited to each other, and would make each other happy; and, as a woman who knew the value of money, she was fully alive to the advantage her son would derive from marrying a girl with so large a fortune as Dora would be sure to possess.

In the evening she mentioned the matter to Randle. She thought it might be expedient to put the idea into his mind also, if peradventure it were not there already.

"Poor Dora," she began; "it will be very lonely for her at Deepdene. Her aunt Ford is no company for anybody. When the funeral is over and everything settled she will feel the loss of her father more than ever."

"She will, indeed, poor girl," answered Randle, pityingly. "But we must have her here often. She is always pleased to come to Redscar. I have heard her say she feels more at home here than at Deepdene."

"I am afraid that cannot be, Randle. You forget that Dora is now a woman. People would talk."

"What would they talk about? Let them talk," exclaimed Randle, who had a great contempt for what he called "twaddle," meaning thereby gossip and scandal.

"It is very easy for you to despise talk, but Dora would probably be less indifferent. Suppose they said she came here to see you?"

"Suppose they did, what then?"

"Dear me, Randle, how obtuse you are! Would you like it to be said of Dora that she came here to look for a husband?"

"Oh, that is it, is it?"

"Yes, that is it. Has no such idea ever occurred to you?"

"What, that Dora came here to look for a husband?"

"No; you know what I mean. Has the thought that you might do worse than make her your wife never occurred to you?"

"Honestly, mother, it never has. I have always looked upon Dora as a sister, and the idea of marrying her, now you mention it, seems to me positively unnatural."

"Perhaps when you have thought a little more about it, it may seem less so. And oh, Randle, nothing would please me more than to see you and Dora united."

"Has Dora any such idea, do you think?" asked Randle, sharply.

"That is more than I can say; but I almost think so. I think if you were to ask her she would not say you nay."

"I hope you are wrong, mother. I should be sorry to think

that Dora's feeling for me is other than sisterly ; for great as is my affection for her, it falls far short of the love a man ought to have for the woman he means to marry. I have a warm brotherly love for her, but nothing more."

"The more would come in time, Randle. At any rate, think about it."

"You put it in such a way that I cannot help thinking about it, mother. I shall think about it a great deal, though perhaps not in the sense you desire."

And he did. As he said, the idea of being more than a brother to Dora in affection, or a cousin in fact, had never entered his mind, and, as it seemed to him, there was no particular reason why he should make haste to marry—either her or anybody else. But if his mother were right in her conjecture that Dora loved him, that she had misinterpreted his attentions, the matter would wear an entirely different aspect. For he liked her so well that he would have been deeply grieved to know that she cherished an unrequited love, and he admitted to himself that if he should resolve to marry he could not find anywhere a better or more suitable wife than Dora. True, he could not offer her that higher love, that thorough devotion of heart and mind which are the tokens of a great passion ; but these, as his mother had suggested, might come with time.

And then he thought of Lady Muriel, of her last words of farewell, and the bunch of forget-me-nots which he still kept hidden away in one of the drawers of his writing-table. Long past as the time was, the thought almost made him tremble. The passion that he lacked for Dora he could, had circumstances been propitious, have felt for Lady Muriel—had almost felt indeed. But the rubs of time had already dulled the vividness of the impression she had made upon him, and if the memory of their meeting and parting came back to him, as it sometimes did, he would thrust it aside, with a smile at his own folly for allowing his thoughts to dwell on one who could never be his, and whom he might never see again.

As for Dora, there was no need for a present decision. Even if he should come to the resolution which his mother so evidently desired, it would not be seemly to broach the matter for some time after Mr. Ryvington's funeral. Meanwhile he would watch his cousin and try to find out if his mother's surmise as to the nature of her affection for him had any foundation in fact.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. RYVINGTON'S WILL.

Two days afterwards, Mr. Ryvington was buried.

The funeral, as he would doubtless himself have desired, was conducted with considerable pomp. The hearse was drawn by four horses, brought expressly from Manchester; the tenants and workmen of the deceased gentleman followed his remains to the grave. The Mayor of Whitebrook attended the funeral in person; many of the notabilities of the town and several of the neighbouring gentry sent their condolences and their carriages; and altogether Mr. Ryvington was more honoured in his death than he had been in his life.

When the time came for reading the will, Mr. Pleasington caused it to be intimated to the members of the two families that he awaited them in a room which the late Mr. Ryvington had been in the habit of calling his study. Besides Mr. Yardley, steward, agent, and land surveyor, none but kinsfolk of the deceased were included in the lawyer's invitation. Yardley had been Mr. Ryvington's man of business, and knew better than anybody else the value of his property and the ins and outs of his affairs.

"I do not think it is necessary," observed Mr. Pleasington, when his audience was assembled, "to read every word of the will. It will save time if I read only the principal passages and tell you the purport of the rest. The executors and beneficiaries can, of course, be supplied with copies of the document after the will has been proved.

"Well, the testator leaves all his estate, real and personal, to Thomas Pleasington, Randle Ryvington, the younger, of Red-scar, and Reuben Yardley, of Whitebrook——"

Here the lawyer paused and took a pinch of snuff, and Deep Randle, who had never before heard a will read, believing that he had been cut off even without the traditional shilling, turned deadly pale, and was on the point of uttering an exclamation, which as likely as not would have been an imprecation, when the reading was resumed.

"On the following trusts: The ready money—that is to say the bank balances and any moneys that may remain in the hands of Mr. Yardley after payment of funeral expenses, debts, and residuary charges—has to be equally divided between the testator's two children, Randle and Dorothea, the latter's share to be paid over to her on her attaining the age of twenty-one."

"How much will that be?" interrupted Deep Randle, sharply.

"That is hard to say until we know what them residuary expenses come to," said Yardley, who, albeit a man of fair education, had fallen so much into the habit of talking broad Lancashire that it was difficult for him to speak good English. "Happen a couple of thousand pounds."

"All the residue of the property, with the exception of a few trifling legacies," continued Mr. Pleasington, "has to be held in trust for five years after the testator's death, or until one or both of his children shall marry. If at the end of that time they are still unmarried, the estate has to be divided equally between them. Should they both marry commoners, or if one marries a commoner and the other remains single, the same. In the event of the son marrying first, and marrying a woman of rank—defined as one who, either by courtesy or in her own right, enjoys the title of lady—he takes all. If, on the other hand, the daughter marries first, and marries a man not lower in rank than a baronet, she takes all. Until one of these events comes to pass, or if they do not happen till the lapse of five years from the present time, the rents and profits arising from the estate are to be equally divided between Randle and Dorothea. That is about all, I think, except some directions as to the devolution of the property in the event of either or both of the testator's children dying unmarried before the expiration of the time in question, which it is not needful to read."

For a few minutes after the lawyer had finished his reading, silence prevailed among his listeners, partly from surprise, and partly, perhaps, because they had not quite taken it all in.

Then Dora whispered a word to her two aunts, whereupon they all rose and quitted the room.

"Well," said Yardley, when the men folks were left to themselves, "that's the cobdest [queerest] will I ever heard read, and I've heard many a one. It requires some elucidation, that will does. I was always aware that Mr. Ryvington wanted his family to be summut more than common, but I never thought he was so keen to mate his childer wi' quality as that comes to. As I understand, if Mr. Randle here can light of a nowbleman's daughter as will have him, he may take all, and Miss Dora will get nowt."

"Provided the lady has a title."

"And hasn't all nowblemen's daughters titles?"

"No, only the daughters of earls, marquises, and dukes, I think."

"Would a widow do, thinken you?"

"Certainly, if she were a 'lady.'"

"Do you think the will is good?" asked Deep Randle, quietly; for, though small annoyances often caused him to lose temper, he could keep cool when coolness was necessary, and quarrelling with Mr. Pleasington and his father's trustees could profit him nothing.

"If you mean do I think the will is a wise one, I say no; for I think nothing can be more foolish than for a father to attempt to impose conditions on his children such as those contained in this will. But if you mean do I think the will is valid, I say yes, decidedly."

"That is what I mean. I put the question because my father told me a short time ago that he had left the estate practically to me."

"So he has."

"How do you make that out?"

"Don't you see? It is easier for you to marry a 'lady' than for your sister to marry a lord. You can put yourself forward. You can ask, and if you are refused by one woman of rank you may propose to another. But your sister cannot ask, or, with due regard to modesty, put herself in the way of being asked. In my opinion your sister is most unfairly dealt with. She is put in an entirely false position."

"You are rey, Mr. Pleasington," put in Yardley. "That was the forst thowt as struck me when you read that part of the will out."

"I, too, am quite of Mr. Pleasington's opinion," observed Randle. "It is a most unfortunate will, and likely, I fear, to lead to grave complications. I am not surprised my uncle wanted to cancel it. If I had not given him my promise to act, I should certainly have refused to be one of the executors under such a will."

"Well, there is no use crying over spilt milk. It is past altering now. *Nil nisi bonum*, you know. Don't let us be finding fault with our departed friend when he is hardly cold in his grave. None of us here are responsible for his will. He took his own course, in spite of my remonstrances. All that remains to be done is to make the best of it, and do our duty as trustees faithfully. And I am sure we may count on the cordial support of the young squire. May we not, Mr. Ryvington?"

"I only want what is right, Mr. Pleasington," said Deep Randle (he dearly liked to be called 'the young squire'). "I do not deny that I am disappointed with the will. It is not what I expected. But, as you say, it is past altering, and I do not mean to raise any difficulty. It is for you to act. As for me——"

At this moment the door opened, and Dora, hurriedly entering

the room, walked straight to Mr. Pleasington. She seemed greatly agitated. Her face expressed in equal measure grief and indignation; and she was twisting her pocket-handkerchief with both hands, as if she would tear it to pieces.

"Will you please tell me, Mr. Pleasington," she said, speaking slowly, and in a suppressed voice, as if she had difficulty in mastering her emotion, "what I have done that my father should have cast such a slur upon me?"

"My dear young lady, I do not understand. How has he cast a slur upon you?"

"What! Is it not casting a slur upon me to suppose I am so eager to marry a baronet or a lord that in order to do so I would deprive my brother of his inheritance? Did he think I would offer myself and my fortune as a prize to the first man of title that offered himself? Oh, it is cruel! Papa did not know what he was doing; he did not think, or he could not have made such a will. But I have made up my mind, Mr. Ryvington. I refuse the condition, and I renounce the bequest. Let Randle keep the estate. I have the fortune my dear mother left me; that is enough."

"My dear Miss Dora, you do not know what you are saying. I can quite understand your feelings, but in a day or two, when you have thought the matter calmly over, I think you will view it in a different light. And as for your father, though I regret that he should have made such a will, we must remember that it was prompted by a desire to promote what he deemed the interest of the family and your happiness."

"That may be, Mr. Pleasington," replied Dora, whose excitement seemed to be subsiding; "and I have nothing to say against papa; perhaps I allowed my feelings to carry me too much away just now. He had a right to do what he liked with his own. At the same time, I adhere to my resolution. I shall transfer all my interest in the estate to my brother."

"Happily, Miss Dora, that is not in your power; and before it is in your power you will, I am sure, have changed your mind. You are not yet of age, remember, and in any case the estate remains vested in the trustees, until one or both of you are married, or until the five years' interregnum has expired. It will be quite time enough to decide what you will do when one or other of those events has come to pass."

"It all seems very strange," she replied, wearily, for her excitement was now giving way to lassitude. "Perhaps I shall understand it better presently. But I do not think I am likely to change my mind, even in five years; and I shall certainly never marry a lord, even if one should ask me, which is not very likely, I think."

"Well, well," said the lawyer, as he opened the door for her to pass out, "do not let us come to a hasty decision, whatever we do. Many a thing may happen before your next birthday, and many more before the trusteeship expires."

CHAPTER XXVII.

TOM CLIVIGER'S ADVICE.

ALTHOUGH Deep Randle, or, to give him the designation he now considered his due, Mr. Ryvington, had heard his sister's declaration with considerable satisfaction, he was by no means free from anxiety as to the possibilities which the strange provisions of his father's will opened up; and a few weeks after the funeral he took occasion to talk the matter over with his particular friend, Mr. Thomas Cliviger.

Thomas, or, as his intimates generally called him, "Tom," was a yarn agent in a large way of business, with one office at Whitebrook, another at Manchester, and a house in the neighbourhood of Deepdene. Yarn agents have been defined by a great authority as a class of men who spend their lives in cheating for fractions of farthings. It has even been suggested that the most of them deserve no better fate than to be hanged with their own yarn, like the weaver in the song. But these, doubtless, are merely samples of the unfounded aspersions so frequently cast on the characters of men who get their livings, and sometimes grow rich, on fees, brokerages, and commission. The fact that yarn agents, like stockbrokers, exist is proof presumptive that they are indispensable. Men who are indispensable cannot be otherwise than useful, and useful people, though they may not invariably be endowed with all the virtues, are worthy of respect. At any rate, Tom Cliviger thought himself as good as the best, and associated, as he frequently boasted, with the *crème de la crème* of Whitebrook society. He had a nice place in the country, a grouse moor in Yorkshire, went a-hunting, had ridden in more than one steeple-chase; and he liked a deal in horseflesh, of which he had the reputation of being a capital judge, even better than a transaction in yarn. There was probably a little horsey-ness in his character, as there certainly was in his appearance; for albeit he always dressed well, and in good taste, the cut of his trousers, the shape of his coat, the nattiness of his boots, his figure even, and, above all, a certain jockey-like keenness of look suggested a decided affinity for things equine. Tom had not the reputation of being rich, yet he never seemed either short of

money or afraid of spending it. But it was generally supposed that he added considerably to the income arising from his yarn agencies by shrewd dealings in cotton and judicious operations on the Stock Exchange, and that he spent pretty nearly all he made.

He had called at Deepdene on the occasion in question to inquire if Randle would accept the mastership of the Whitebrook harriers from the beginning of the coming season. At a meeting of the subscribers, held a few days previously, the present master had announced his intention of resigning, and they all thought, said Cliviger, that no one was so well qualified in every way to become his successor as Mr. Ryvington.

"I don't know, Tom, I am sure," replied Randle (who, despite his doubts, was well pleased that the offer had been made to him). "You see, it is only a few weeks since my father died. Would it be right—I mean, would it be proper—for me to take a public position like that so soon after his death?"

"It would not be soon after his death. Freckleton will keep the mastership until November, and that is something like four months off; and you could wear a black coat for a while, you know. There would be no impropriety in that, I am sure."

"No, Tom," returned Randle, with a smile. "I don't suppose that anybody, even my aunt Sophia, would object to my wearing a black coat; and, so far as the proprieties are concerned, I daresay I might, as you propose, take the hounds from November next. But there is another difficulty that weighs on me rather, and I am glad you have called, as I wanted to talk to you about it. You have heard something about my father's will, I daresay?"

"Not very much, or rather not much that is trustworthy. There are all sorts of stories going. You have to marry the Princess Beatrice, I suppose?" said Tom, with a merry twinkle in his eye as he took a sip of his brandy-and-water.

"Nay, hang it; not so bad as that. But it is bad enough, though. We want to keep it as quiet as possible; but there is no secret about a will of which anybody can get a copy for a guinea; and I may as well tell you all. If I marry a 'lady' before my sister marries a lord I take all the property. If my sister marries a lord or a baronet before I marry a 'lady,' she takes all the property. If we both marry untitled persons, or if we don't marry at all during the next five years, the property is divided between us, share and share alike, you know. That is the gist of it. But Miss Ryvington declares that she will not marry the best lord that ever breathed, even if one should ask her, which is perhaps not as unlikely as she imagines. The will assumes, she says, that she would be willing to buy a husband—exchange her fortune for a title; and she is annoyed past

everything that her father should have thought her capable of such an enormity."

"Then you are all right."

"Do you think so? I do not see it in that light; I only wish I did. It is all very well talking; but even a romantic girl will think twice before she throws away £12,000 a-year; and if a chance of keeping it—and getting a noble husband into the bargain—were to come in her way, I am very much afraid she would accept it, in spite of her protestations."

"Twelve thousand a year! Is it so much, then?"

"Quite. None of us thought the governor had such a pile; but he had a lot of railway stock that I knew nothing of. He was always very close about his affairs, you know. Yes, it is a great deal too much to run the risk of losing."

"I understand now. The case seems clear enough. You must marry some earl's or marquis's daughter—that's all."

"That's all! Better say a duke's daughter, while you are at it," laughed Randle. "But, unfortunately, I do not happen to number any earls, or marquises, or even barons among my acquaintances. You could not introduce me to one, could you, Tom? Old Pleasington says the will is much more in my favour than my sister's. But, really, I do not see it. There are hundreds of spendthrift younger sons with handles to their names, and impecunious baronets, who would only be too glad to marry a pretty girl of good family with £12,000 a year—if they had the chance; and she will have offers before long, too, see if she has not. But no lady of title is likely to seek me out, and make me an offer."

"Still there are doubtless many who would be glad to have you, if they only knew, and had the chance. A man with £12,000 a year is not to be picked up every day, even in aristocratic circles."

"Therein lies the difficulty, my dear Cliviger. How am I to let them know? I cannot advertise, or go knocking promiscuously at the doors of earls and marquises, and ask if they have any daughters to marry. And I am not going to marry anybody. I shall not be very exacting, but I must have youth, good looks, and good temper."

"So you may, if you go about it the right way; and there is a way," said Tom, sententiously, as he lit another cigar.

"What is it? I am sure I shall be greatly indebted to you, if you will tell me."

"You must get into Parliament."

"But how?" exclaimed Randle, eagerly; for the idea had already occurred to him, but its realisation seemed so hopeless that he had long ago dismissed it from his mind.

"Stand for Whitebrook at the next election."

"Nonsense! I should not have a ghost of a chance. How could I hope to oust James Tugwood, who has sat for the borough fifteen years and more? And were not the two parties so evenly matched at the last election that they agreed to divide the representation between them, and have no more contests?"

"An agreement like that does not stand for ever—even if half-a-dozen men had a right to pledge a whole party, which they certainly have not. Besides, some important changes have taken place since the last election, and the changes are all in our favour. In my opinion, if we run two candidates at the next election, we shall get them both in. Most of the new mills that have been built the last four or five years are Conservative; while Garrington's, and two or three smaller concerns—all Liberals—have failed, and either been floated (converted into joint-stock companies) or stopped altogether. The balance is decidedly in our favour now, whatever it was at the last election."

"You think, then, that the factories return the members?"

"Of course they do. Tell me how many horse-power—the best measure of political influence—there are on the Conservative, and how many on the Liberal side, and I will tell you how an election will go. Of course, I mean other things being equal, and in quiet times; for if you were to pit a popular against an unpopular candidate, a good speaker against a bad one, or if some great question were at stake, then my calculation might be at fault."

"Precisely. And, if I were to contest the borough with Tugwood, I should be an unpopular pitted against a popular candidate."

"Not you. James Tugwood is respected by respectable people, perhaps, but he is not popular with the masses. The Tugwoods grind their hands too much for that, and he is a wretchedly poor stick of a speaker. Now, you speak very fairly. With a little practice, you would speak really well. Your family is well known, you live in the neighbourhood, and have property in the borough. You are not a master, so that the hands can have nothing against you. If the party will adopt you as their second candidate, I think you cannot miss getting in."

"Do you think they will, though?"

"They shall, if you are willing to stand. I'll be answerable for that. Will you?"

"I will, Tom. Apart altogether from my father's will, and that, I should be glad to be member for Whitebrook. It is the height of my ambition."

"All right, Mr. Ryvington. Only do as I tell you, and you shall be member for Whitebrook, and it will be your own fault if

you do not marry a duke's daughter. Once in London with M.P. to your name, rich and a bachelor, you will have no difficulty in finding a wife with a handle to hers."

"I daresay you are right, Tom. But I am afraid I shall have an awfully long time to wait. There can hardly be an election under two or three years at the soonest."

"I am not so sure about that," answered Cliviger, with a knowing look. "I heard something the other day that will surprise you. But this is entirely between ourselves, you know."

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"Well, the Tugwoods were very heavily hit in the American war. They lost immensely. But everybody thought they could stand it, and that they had made money since. They have not; it came to my knowledge the other day, quite accidentally, that they have been trying lately to retrieve their losses by operations in cotton futures, and that sort of thing. Now I know—by the way the market has gone lately—that they have only made bad worse; and I doubt if Tugwoods, high as they stand, if they were wound up to-morrow, could pay twenty shillings in the pound. And Oliver Tugwood has not the look of a solvent man. I have made as many bad debts as most folks; and there is a troubled, hunted expression in his eye, which I have often noticed in men who were going to fail. I do not think James Tugwood will ever stand for Whitebrook again, and I should not be surprised if he had to resign long before the general election. At any rate we must be prepared."

"You had better speak to Bellasis and the others at once, then."

"No, Ryvington, that is not our little game. It is too soon to show our hand yet. I would not say a word to anybody until the time comes, if only to keep the other side quiet, and leave them in the belief that they have no opposition to fear. All that you have to do for the present is just to show yourself a little more. Go to a meeting now and again—it does not matter much what it is about—and make a speech. Increase your father's subscriptions to the local charities; double his subscription to the registration fund; take an interest in schools and churches, and such like. But say as little about politics as you can, and, above all, don't let it be seen that you mean to offer yourself as a candidate. Then, when the time comes, and there is question of an election, either by reason of Tugwood's resignation or a dissolution, I will tell our fellows that they must fight; and that I have a man ready. They will not say nay; and if they do we will have your address out, and commit them to a contest before they know where they are. Talking of addresses, it would not be amiss to have one or two ready sketched out."

"Capital, splendidly conceived," exclaimed Randle, warmly. "Why, what a clever fellow you are, Tom! You ought to set up as a professional election agent. How can I sufficiently thank you? In any event, I shall be greatly obliged to you; but, if by your help I get into Parliament, I shall be your debtor for life. If I can do anything for you, now or at any other time, you have only to speak. But, I say, how much will it cost?"

"That is what I was just going to speak to you about. I don't suppose the legal expenses will stand you in more than five or six hundred pounds. Anything over and above that, I will see to; but, of course, you must know nothing about that——"

"Of course not; still I don't quite understand where——"

"The sinews of war are to come from," said Cliviger, completing the sentence. "That is what I am coming to. I can arrange it all, so that nobody will be the wiser, and you can do me a good turn at the same time."

"I am sure I should only be too glad if you will tell me in what way," observed Randle, incautiously.

"Well, you see, we are holding a large stock of cotton and yarn just now, besides being under heavy advances to our spinners. I am afraid to say how much money we have out. This is all very well in one way, because it brings lots of grist to the mill—indeed, we were never doing so well—but it takes a lot of tin, and I have had to ask our bankers to increase our overdraft. They are quite willing, only they want cover of some sort, and I thought perhaps you would give us your guarantee for about £3,000. It will be quite temporary, and I could do with less, but I intend to provide out of it what is necessary for—you know what. A nod is as good as a wink in these matters. And then, when the time comes, or rather when it has gone by, we can square up."

This proposal was far from being agreeable to Deep Randle. Though he knew nothing of Cliviger's means or his business, he could not help drawing from his style of living inferences not altogether favourable to his solvency. At any rate he would not have trusted him £3,000, or even a much smaller sum, from choice; yet, seeing that the yarn agent's co-operation was almost indispensable to the success of his schemes, and that the granting of the accommodation he asked for would attach him to his fortunes, he closed promptly with the offer.

"All right, Tom, I'll do it," he said, after a short pause.

"Thank you very much. You will not regret doing me this kindness, Ryvington. If we both live till the next election, you are as sure to be one of the members for Whitebrook as you are sitting there. You may look upon that as settled. I must

not forget about the hunt, however. You will take the mastership, of course?"

"Yes, and you can say that I shall double my subscription."

"Your message shall be duly delivered. I am sure it will give great satisfaction. And now I think I must leave you. I will call one of these days to obtain your signature to that little document."

"Whenever you like, Tom," replied Randle, who was politic enough not to let Cliviger see that he had any misgiving as to the consequences of his complaisance.

"Dash it," muttered the yarn agent, as he rode homeward, "I wish I had bled him a bit more. He would have done £5,000 I do believe."

"Confound it," said Mr. Ryvington to himself, so soon as his guest was out of earshot, "I am very much afraid I shall have to find every blessed halfpenny of that £3,000 myself. I wish I were as sure of being member for Whitebrook."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RIBBLETON STRIKE.

As may be supposed, Mr. Ryvington's will was a frequent subject of conversation at Redscar. The more he thought about it, Randle said, the less he liked it. He saw in its conditions a deeply-laid scheme to give the whole of the property to the son, and virtually disinherit the daughter. The promise made by his uncle to Dora and her mother, while kept to the ear, was broken to the hope. He could hardly speak of him with patience, and he held the old man's memory in little honour. One consequence of the will was Randle's decided refusal to comply with his mother's wish that he should "think of" marrying Dora, or at least of proposing to her. To do so, he said, would simply be playing into her brother's hands—making him a present of the estate. For however unlikely it was that any man with the requisite qualifications should make Dora an offer, or that if such an offer were made she would accept it, the contingency was at least conceivable, and it was not for him to render it impossible. He did not feel, moreover, that he loved his cousin well enough to marry her, nor had he seen anything in her manner to justify his mother's suspicion that Dora's affection for him was other than it had ever been, or more than sisterly.

Mrs. Ryvington acquiesced in this conclusion with more equanimity than her son had expected. Like him, she probably

thought that it would be wrong to stand in the way of Dora's marrying a man of title. It is conceivable, too, that the forfeiture of her niece's contingent interest in her father's estate, which her marriage with Randle would have entailed, may have helped to reconcile Mrs. Ryvington to the abandonment of her match-making project. Her kindness to Dora, however, continued unabated, and some time after the funeral the two went together for a long visit to the sea-side.

Bob, who had a passion for paradox, and for tracing events to remote causes, one day startled his mother by suggesting that she was the involuntary cause of all the trouble.

"That watch has done all the mischief, mother," he said, "and the making a present of it to uncle was your idea."

"Whatever do you mean, Robert? What has the watch to do with it?"

"Why, don't you see? If we had not given uncle the watch, he would certainly not have gone with us to Chatburn. If he had not gone to Chatburn, he would not have been killed, and he would have had ample time before he died to alter that wretched will of his; or perhaps Dora or Randle might have married, and then he would have been forced to make other arrangements."

"How absurdly you talk, Robert! I might just as well say that, if you had not chosen to celebrate your birthday by a trip to Salley and Chatburn, your uncle would have been still alive."

"Anyhow," returned Bob, to whom this view of the matter had not previously occurred, "the watch has not proved a good investment. If I had known, I am sure I should not have joined in making Deep Randle a present of £100, and that is what it amounts to."

"Is your cousin wearing the watch already, then?"

"Rather; and very proud of it he seems. Shows it to people as what he calls a remarkable specimen of horological skill; but he takes care never to say how he came by it."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Ryvington. "That is not very candid, I think;" and then the conversation took another turn, for Bob saw that, albeit his mother had so little to say, she was far from being pleased. She had a particular distaste for bad investments, whether of hope or cash; and it was a very sore point with her that her ingenious scheme for the reconciliation of the two families should have resulted only in placing her nephew Randle, between whom and herself there was the least possible love lost, in possession of a remarkable specimen of horological skill at her son's expense.

Meanwhile, Randle of Redscar had his hands full. The administration of his uncle's estate demanded more of his time

and attention than he had anticipated. At the same time his own business, owing to the unsatisfactory state of the cotton market and several heavy failures in Manchester, was giving him some anxiety, and the difficulties between the Ribbleton masters and their hands, which had been the subject of a conversation between William Bellasis and himself on the way to Chatburn, had resulted at length in an open rupture. The work-people contended that they were worse paid than any other work-people in the county; that, while their employers professed to regulate their wages by the standard list in vogue at Whitebrook, matters were so contrived that they earned from five to ten per cent. less than the Whitebrook weavers. To this the masters replied that, if their hands earned lower wages than other hands, it was because they worked with less energy. The difference, in fact, as they contended, arose from a difference of skill, not from a difference in the rate of pay. This the work-people denied, alleging that when Ribbleton weavers went to Whitebrook, as they frequently did, they earned quite as much as the Whitebrook weavers. After a long and acrimonious war of words, and several vain attempts to effect a compromise, the Ribbleton people turned out.

The controversy by which the strike was preceded excited general attention. The cause of the hands was warmly taken up by their fellow work-people throughout the district. Enthusiastic meetings were held on behalf of the strikers all over the county, and collections made for them in every factory in Mid-Lancashire.

The excitement among the Whitebrook work-people was intense. A Ribbleton Strike Committee was organised, and a levy of a certain sum per loom ordered and rigidly exacted. The few weavers who refused to pay were boycotted in fact, if not in name. Their names were published in the weekly subscription lists with opprobrious comments, sarcastic remarks, and hardly veiled threats. After reciting, for instance, that the weekly levy at Redscar had produced £48 15s. 9d., there would follow such observations as these:—

“That great hulking woman as weaves i’ th’ nook has only paid 3d. a loom this week. If she doesn’t do better next Saturday, she’ll get summut as she does not like.”

“Mary Ann, at number sixteen and seventeen, paid nowt last week. If she does not pay up next, she’ll be getting that red head of hers set on fire.”

“Neddy Wag (Ned the Wag) has not paid a half-penny since last Saturday but one. He says as he cannot spare th’ brass. They say as he wants it all to get his dandy breeches out o’ th’ popshop.”

“Brandy-nosed Bill says as he’ll pay nowt. Shout him home, lads.”

The shouting home consisted in following the recusants from the factories at which they worked to the places where they lived, with an accompaniment of howls, reproaches, and derisive cheers, finishing up with a serenade of taunts and execrations. This mode of treatment was probably quite as effective as open violence would have been, and possessed, moreover, the incidental advantage of not being flagrantly illegal. The victims did not generally hold out more than a week. To live in a “white light of publicity,” to be gibbeted every Saturday in print, and followed about the country every day by a howling mob, was an ordeal that none liked, and few were resolute enough to withstand. The weekly levy was more punctually paid than if it had been a government tax. It produced a sum large enough to maintain the turnouts in comparative comfort, and, unless the masters should give way, it seemed as if the strike might go on for ever.

In these alarming circumstances, the Ribbleton masters appealed for help to their *confrères* of Whitebrook and of other localities. Their cause, they said, was the cause of all. If they gave in—and without help they would be compelled to give in—the masters all over the county would be attacked in detail and constrained to concede a general advance of wages. The force of this argument was admitted, and a general advance of wages not being regarded as a desirable contingency, measures were taken to afford substantial aid to the Ribbleton employers in the contest in which they were engaged. Whitebrook took a leading part in the movement. An association of masters was organised, and a meeting called to receive a deputation from Ribbleton and devise means for procuring the sinews of war.

All this was very disagreeable to Randle. He neither wanted to isolate himself from his neighbours nor to engage in a struggle with his hands. The firm’s relations with their work-people were excellent, and the brothers had no reason to suppose they would be otherwise, whatever might be the issue of the contest at Ribbleton. Though in Whitebrook they were not of it. Most of their hands had been with them all their lives, not a few belonged to families that had lived and wrought at Redscar for three generations; and as Ryvington and Sons manufactured a special class of goods, for which they had a name, they could afford, and found it worth their while, to pay relatively high wages. They were thus in a somewhat different position from their neighbours, and Randle saw no reason why he should join in the proposed subsidy to the Ribbleton masters.

These outside matters, as he called them—his uncle’s trust,

the strike, the aberrations of the markets, and the failures of merchants—were all the more annoying to Randle that he had lately conceived a great idea, which he was anxious to make an attempt towards putting into execution, and which would necessitate a long series of preliminary experiments. This idea was nothing less than to effect the transmission of power by electricity. Accustomed to look into the nature of things, he had long regretted the waste of energy involved in the moving of machinery by means of the wheels, shafts, pulleys and belts which are at present used for this purpose. After much cogitation he had come to the conclusion that it might not be impossible to substitute for these complicated appliances a system of wires and small dynamo-machines which, placed in metallic communication with current-generating dynamo-machines near the engines, would transmit swiftly and noiselessly, without friction and waste, and almost without cost, power to every part of a mill where power was required.

Such an invention as this would revolutionise, not the cotton trade only, but every industry in the country, lighten labour, and economise beyond estimation the production of all machine-made articles. But its successful accomplishment, even if success were possible—as to which Randle had not as yet thoroughly satisfied himself—might demand years of undivided attention. This Randle could not give. He nevertheless resolved to do his best, and all the time he could snatch from his regular work and imperative duties was spent in his private workshop, where he had the help of a very clever practical mechanic, for, apart from his latest scheme, Randle had always something new in hand. He was never satisfied with things as they were if he could see a way of making them better.

One afternoon, when the Ribbleton strike had been going on two or three weeks, he left his batteries and lathes, with which he had been busied the greater part of the day, and went, according to his wont, to the counting-house to overlook that department of the business. There he found Robert.

“Anything new, Bob?” he asked.

“Nothing very particular. Bellasis and Isaac Potter called about an hour since; but I told them you were very busy, and as they seemed in a hurry they had better say to me what they had to say. They wanted to see you about the Masters’ Defence Association, you know, and this strike.”

“Yes; what about it?”

“There has to be a meeting next Wednesday night at the ‘Rainbow,’ six o’clock sharp, to hear what the Ribbleton masters have to say, and consider what should be done for them; and they want you to be there, and no mistake.”

"Did they give you any idea as to what was likely to be done?"

"Yes; Bellasis intends to propose a weekly levy of ten shillings a horse-power—the least, they reckon, the Ribbleton people can do with—just to help them to keep their factories in order, and leave a trifle towards depreciation and loss of interest."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I would talk to you, that you would certainly go to the meeting, and that I had no doubt we should do what the others did."

"That was going a little too far, Bob. I am not sure we shall do as the others do."

"But won't it look very mean, Ran, to refuse to subscribe when every concern in the neighbourhood is subscribing? Besides, we ought to stand by our order. See how united the hands are."

"By all means, when our order is in the right. But we should be fools to pay £70 a week—and that is what it will come to—to prevent ourselves being thought mean, and to support people who are in the wrong."

"Why, Randle, you surprise me! I never heard you talk like that before. How can the Ribbleton masters miss being in the right? Are they not willing to pay by the standard list, and have not the hands struck against the standard list?"

"Not, as I understand, so much against the standard list as against its results, in the shape of earnings, which they say are considerably less at Ribbleton than they are here. That is really the question in dispute, and before I agree to pay £70 a week, or seventy pence, to these Ribbleton employers, I must be satisfied that their hands earn as much as our hands, or that, if they don't, it is their own fault. You know how greatly earnings are affected by the way looms are geared up and speeded, the sorts of yarns used, and goods produced, and a variety of other causes."

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"I mean to look into it myself. I have plenty of irons in the fire just now—more than I can keep hot, I am afraid—but tomorrow I mean to ride over to Ribbleton, see the strike committee there, and hear their side of the question. There is nothing like a bit of cross-examination for getting to the bottom of things. Then, at the meeting on Wednesday, I shall ask the Ribbleton deputation a question or two, and try to do the right thing, whether it pleases or displeases. Our interest in the dispute is, it seems to me, very slight. Still, if I find that the demands of the Ribbleton hands are unreasonable, I will cast in my lot with my neighbours. If not, I won't, come what may."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MASTERS' MEETING.

THE "Rainbow" was the largest, and, as a Whitebrook magnate once publicly observed, the "most respectable" inn in the town. If it had been in a continental town, it would have called itself a "grand hotel." Yet the "Rainbow" was far from being an imposing edifice. Built of soot-blackened brick, slab-sided, and flat-windowed, with a heavy portico, and a flight of steps adorned with black railings on each side of the front door, its aspect, especially in bad weather—and the weather at Whitebrook often was bad—was funereal in the extreme. But for the frequent arrivals and departures of cabs, carriages, and omnibuses, the ingress and egress of guests, and the huge sign that hung above the door, the "Rainbow" might have passed for a great undertaker's shop, or the deadhouse of the church hard by. Inside, however, there were both cheerfulness and good cheer. The corridors were wide, the rooms lofty, the liquors good. The bar-parlour was snugness itself, and the landlord and landlady were an old-fashioned couple, who had always a pleasant smile and a warm welcome for their friends. Hence the "Rainbow" was as popular as its proprietors were prosperous. To tell the truth, it was a little too popular for the health and good repute of a good many folks at Whitebrook. A great deal too much whisky, some people said, was drunk in the bar-parlour even by the fathers of the town, and in a cosy and retired room upstairs the gilded youth of Whitebrook were wont to hold nightly revels.

The "Rainbow," moreover, possessed a large apartment which served as an assembly room, and wherein large dinner parties, balls, and semi-public meetings were occasionally held. This was the room in which the meeting of the Whitebrook masters was appointed to take place, and there, on the Wednesday evening after the conversation recorded in the foregoing chapter, were gathered nearly all the manufacturers of the town and neighbourhood.

Among them were Randle and Robert Ryvington.

Randle had been informed the day before that the Masters' Committee had resolved to submit to the meeting two alternative propositions: one to subsidise the Ribbleton masters in the way already described, and the other to lock out the Whitebrook hands for a fortnight, or until the Ribbleton weavers should agree to resume their work on the old conditions. It was considered that, the Whitebrook operatives being the warmest

supporters of the turn-outs, a stoppage—which would, of course, render it impossible for them to continue their subscriptions—could hardly fail to bring the strike to a speedy termination. The hands, it seemed, had guessed, or been told, what was in contemplation, for an excited crowd had gathered in front of the “Rainbow”; and the Ribbleton masters, as they entered the inn, were greeted with a round of groans.

The first business of the meeting was to elect a chairman, and the choice, almost as a matter of course, fell upon Mr. Roger Stubbins, a broad-set, pasty-faced man, with protuberant stomach and out-starting eyes, who boasted with justice that he was the largest employer of labour in the borough. His other qualifications for the position were an overbearing manner and a total inability to make a speech of which anybody could make sense. But he could sit in a chair, call upon the secretary to read the report of the committee, and exhort the meeting from time to time not to come to “an ‘asty conclusion.”

It is not necessary to describe the proceedings of the meeting in detail. The Ribbleton masters told their tale, and were asked some questions by Randle and others. Several speeches were then made, and as the plan of attempting to bring the Ribbleton strike to an end by starving the Whitebrook weavers seemed to find more favour than subsidising the Ribbleton masters, it was embodied in a resolution and put to the meeting. On this Randle rose and asked permission to say a few words. After exposing the injustice of the expedient proposed, in that it would involve the punishment of innocent women and children for the supposed sins of their men folks, he dealt with the questions at issue between the Ribbleton employers and their hands; showed that the latter, albeit nominally paid by the Whitebrook standard list, earned, from no lack of diligence or skill on their part, less money than the Whitebrook hands; and concluded a pithy and well-delivered speech by announcing that the firm of Ryvington and Sons would neither contribute to a subsidy nor join in a lock-out.

“And as for myself,” he concluded, “my sympathies are with the Ribbleton weavers, not with the Ribbleton masters.”

The speech acted as a sort of moral bomb-shell. It created a great sensation, and was followed by a general hubbub. Everybody talked at once. The Ribbleton masters were furious; several of the men near Randle uttered angry remonstrances; one or two, who had risen from the ranks, audibly cursed. The chairman loudly expressed the opinion that Mr. Ryvington had come “to an ‘asty conclusion, a very ‘asty conclusion,” and warmly exhorted him to reconsider his decision—“it would do so much ‘arm among the ‘ands.”

The commotion was so great, indeed, that a still greater commotion which was going on outside passed for a time almost without notice. The innocent cause of it was a certain knight of the needle, by name John Gully, well known in Whitebrook, though not of it. John's establishment was at Ribbleton, but he visited Whitebrook once a week to drum for orders and meet his customers. He had a room in the "Rainbow," known as the Marlborough, where every market day afternoon he held a sort of levée; and possessing some mother wit and a ready tongue, and being withal clever at his calling, his receptions were well attended, especially by the cotton-spinning youths of the town, who, much to the disgust of local snips, gave John the most of their custom. Among his clients were Randle and Robert Ryvington; and Bob liked nothing better than to drop into the Marlborough after the market ordinary on a Wednesday, and drink a glass of brandy and water and smoke a cigar with Gully and the young fellows whom he generally found there. For the tailor was lively and entertaining, a capital story-teller, and as he went about a great deal he had always something new to tell.

But, like everybody else, John had a secret sorrow. Though a prosperous man, with hardly a real care, he allowed a crumpled rose leaf to mar his happiness. He was dissatisfied with his lot; his soul rebelled against the destiny which had made him a tailor and draper; he felt that Nature had fitted him for a higher vocation. It was only rarely, however, and in his most confidential moods, that he unburdened his bosom of its hidden grief. Although Robert Ryvington and he were the best of friends, and Gully had breeched him from his boyhood, Bob learnt for the first time on the day of the masters' meeting that the tailor was less happy than he seemed.

They chanced to be alone together; all the others had gone out. John was directing and preparing for despatch to his customers a number of parcels, a proceeding which led Robert to remark that he seemed to be doing a good business.

"I am doing a good business, Mr. Robert," replied the tailor, as he slapped his hand on a bundle which he had just tied up. "You see all these parcels; they are going out this evening, and I have booked as many orders to-day as will keep me busy cutting out for a fortnight to come. Yes, I am doing well; better than all the tailors in this town rolled together. But——" Here John, who was in his shirt-sleeves, put his hands in his breeches pockets and sighed.

"But what, Gully? Are you not content?"

"As a tailor, yes; as a man, no. I am not content, Mr. Robert; and the more prosperous I become in my vocation the

less happy I am in my heart," replied John, who was a large, good-looking man, stretching his arms impressively towards the sofa on which Bob sat. "For I feel that the energy and perseverance, the ready tact and aptitude for affairs that have raised me to the head of my profession in my native town might, under happier auspices and in another walk of life, have made me somebody—have brought me honour and renown, sir."

"God bless me, Gully," exclaimed Robert, greatly surprised at this outburst, and not certain whether the tailor was in jest or earnest, "what would you like to be?"

"I ought to have been in the law, that is what I ought to have been. A friend of mine said to me the other day, 'Gully,' he said, 'you have gab for anything.' It is true, Mr. Robert; I feel it. I have gab enough for anything. I could jaw a judge frantic, and talk a jury out of their senses; I am sure I could. But, failing that, I should have liked to be a cotton-spinner. There is no telling what it might have led to. The Peels were cotton-spinners. Bright and Bazley are cotton-spinners; so are both our borough members. But a tailor—good heavens!—who ever heard of a tailor becoming a senator or a statesman?" And John shrugged his shoulders, and twisted his face into a comical expression of disgust.

"But really, you know, Gully," rejoined Bob, with a laudable desire to comfort the man, "I don't think you could be doing better. A tailor may be a very honourable man, and tailoring is a useful and respectable calling."

"So it is, very respectable; and, as you say, a tailor may be a man of honour. I believe I am a man of honour. But what is the use? When folks talk about me, I know what they say. 'Gully? Oh, yes, he is a very decent fellow; but he is only a tailor.' Look here!" continued John, excitedly. "I'll tell you what happened to me the other day. I was walking down Southgate, and when I walk I attract some attention. My gait is peculiar" (which was quite true; he always went at a tremendous pace, and flung his arms about like the sails of a windmill). "I know I look queer, but I cannot help it. A chap is as he is made, you know. Well, I passed two fellows in the street, and I could see at once they were talking about me. I have very quick ears, and as I passed I heard one of them ask who that swell was (meaning me). 'I forget his name,' the fellow answered; 'only some d——d tailor or other!' What do you think of that, Mr. Robert? Nice, isn't it, that a man cannot go about his native town without hearing himself spoken of as a d——d tailor? How would you like it? How would you like to belong to such an ignoble profession?"

Here Gully threw himself into an attitude, and looked so

melodramatically indignant that Bob burst into a loud laugh, in which the tailor, after an unsuccessful attempt to maintain his gravity, heartily joined.

"But it's no joke, Mr. Robert. You have no idea how my feelings are hurt, sometimes. Don't I wish I was a cotton-spinner?—that's all. See how they get on."

"Why don't you become one, then? Everybody goes into manufacturing now-a-days—butchers, bakers, and candlestick-makers. You only want a few thousand pounds, and you have got that."

"No, thank you, not if I know it," rejoined the latter, spreading out his palms and shaking his head. "I should be a fool if I did; and, if I know myself, Mr. Robert, I am not a fool. If I don't like tailoring, I understand it, and I don't understand cotton-spinning. When a man gets to my time of life, and has given hostages to fortune, when he is the father of an infant seven weeks old at this present moment, mewling and peeping in its mother's arms—with a possibility of almost indefinite increase of his responsibilities—shunting on to another line of rails is not to be thought of. No, Mr. Robert; a cruel destiny has made me a tailor, and a tailor I must remain until by the favour of my friends—the nobility, clergy, and gentry of this neighbourhood—I am enabled to retire into private life with a competency. Ah, that's a knock at the door, I think. Come in, please."

On this entered a lady with two small boys, who wanted to be measured for two new suits; whereupon Robert withdrew, and shortly afterwards joined his brother in the assembly room.

When the tailor had taken the measure of his little customers, and the difficult questions of style and pattern were satisfactorily arranged with their mamma, and he had directed the last of his parcels, folded up his pattern-books, and put everything into shipshape in readiness for his departure by the eight o'clock train, he suddenly bethought him that he had promised to call on a customer in a street hard by to receive an order. He looked at his watch, and, finding that he had still ample time, he bustled off to keep his appointment, little thinking of the ordeal that awaited him outside.

CHAPTER XXX

ONLY A TAILOR.

IN front of the "Rainbow" was a wide, open space of ground that almost attained to the dignity of a square, where many streets met. About this open space were scattered several groups of factory operatives, a considerable number of whom were standing near the inn door, waiting to hear the issue of the masters' meeting.

To Gully's great surprise, his appearance on the steps that led into the street was the signal for an outburst of groans.

"He's one o' them Ribbleton maysters," sang out a rough-looking fellow in a paper cap.

"And a gradely faa [ugly] un he is," said a woman near the bottom of the steps. "Look what a gret ugly nose he's gotten."

"It is to be hoped he'll never get into no trouble," observed another lady, "for bi' th' mon, if he does, that face of his will hang him. I never seed owt like it out o' th' Preston House o' Correction."

"And them legs," remarked a spindle-shanked self-actor minder, with a short pipe in his mouth. "Did onybody ever see th' like? Why, he couldn't stop a pig in a ginnel [entry], not to save his life, he couldn't." (John's legs were just a little bowed, and, being somewhat sensitive on the point, he felt the insult keenly.)

"And just look at that gowd pin in his dickey [shirt front]. It's cost five sovereigns, if it's cost a penny. There's a diamond in it, isn't there?"

"Not there; it's nobbut a bit o' glass; and if it be, he's bowt it out of his weyvers' bates [abatements] and quarterings [fines for being late]."

This was certainly rather rough on the tailor, but he bore his calumniators no grudge, for had they not taken him for a manufacturer? And, descending into the street without the slightest foreboding of evil, he politely asked the people nearest the steps to let him pass. They did so, though sullenly, and he had some difficulty in shouldering his way through the press; for every now and then somebody would call out, "Give him a shove, he's a Ribbleton mayster."

"Deuced unpleasant this," muttered John, as he fought his way among the surging crowd. "I shall begin to wish soon they had not taken me for a master."

"Bonnet him," was the next cry, and, before he could look

round, his hat was knocked over his eyes, as he afterwards explained, when giving an account of the affair, "by some person or persons unknown."

This was too much.

"It's all an infernal mistake," he shouted, struggling the while to free himself from the castor, the lining of which had fouled on his nose. "I am not a master. I tell you I am not a master. I am a——"

"Thou should ha' said that sooner. Does thou think onybody 'll believe such a lie as that?" said a black-faced moulder, as he gave Gully a push forward. "What does thou want here, trying to take th' bread out o' poor folks' mouths?"

By this time Gully, after being sorely buffeted, had got through the thickest of the crowd, and was beginning to think himself in safety, when from a group of young fellows in iron clogs, a few yards to the right of him, rose the portentous cry of "Punch him; let's punch the beggar."

John Gully was far from being a poltroon, but, with two or three hundred pairs of Lancashire clogs clattering behind him, a braver man than he might well have deemed discretion the better part of valour, and so the tailor, dashing aside the few people about him, sought safety in flight.

"Punch him!" shouted his pursuers. "He's a Ribbleton mayster."

"I'm not," yelled Gully. "I'm a tailor; only a tailor; only a tailor."

In spite of the speed at which he ran, two or three of the men overtook and dealt him several kicks, which, if both pursuers and pursued had not been going fast, might have been dangerous. Even as it was, they were anything but pleasant, and he never ceased protesting as he ran that he was not a master. "I'm only a tailor!" he exclaimed, "a poor, poor tailor."

But this seemed only to add fuel to the fire; the men thought he was fooling them, and poor Gully began to fear that if he did not soon reach a place of refuge they would kill him outright or badly hurt him. The nearest shop was a butcher's, and, as he saw, the lower part of the door was closed, but so great was his terror that he did not wait for it to be opened. With an agility at which nobody was more surprised than himself, he went for the obstacle like a steeple-chaser at his first fence, cleared it at a bound, pitched head foremost into the carcase of a pig, and, colliding against the astonished butcher, knocked him heels over head, while the butcher's wife, who happened to be just then coming out of the room behind the shop, was dropped, as it were by the wind of

the shot, into a sitting position on the floor. On this, the butcher's dog, evidently under the impression that the house had been burglariously entered, and that his master and mistress were being grievously maltreated, made a grab at the intruder's leg, and held on to it.

"Oh, Lord! he is biting," yelled Gully. "Call him off, Radley. Call him off, I say. Oh, Lord, he'll be the death of me. Who knows that the brute is not mad?"

But Radley was past speaking. Every atom of breath in his body had been knocked out of him, and he lay there gasping, and grasping his great stomach with both hands. Mrs. Radley was the first to recover her presence of mind and resume her perpendicular, and, taking the dog by the throat, she made him loosen his grip. Then Gully got up and helped the butcher to his feet.

"By gum, Mr. Gully," exclaimed Radley, after he had felt himself, to see if any of his bones were broken, "that was a rum do, that was. I never saw owt like it in my life. How you did lep o'er that door, to be sure. I wonder you didn't jowl your head against th' top, and knock it clean off. I never see owt done cleverer at a circus. You would make your fortune as a hacrobat; you would that, Mr. Gully."

"Oh, my goodness," groaned the tailor, "what next! Kicked by factory lads, taken for a burglar, bitten by a dog, and compared to an acrobat—all within the space of five minutes. 'To what base uses may we come, Horatio!'"

"Ay, base enough to punch a chap i' that way. But you're mistaken, Mr. Gully; my christened name isn't 'Oratio, it's Arthur. But what's been up?"

"Up! Why, they thought I was one of those rascally Ribbleton masters, to be sure. 'Pon my word, Radley, things are coming to a pretty pass. I am insulted for being a tailor, kicked because I resemble a manufacturer, and bitten by your dog as a burglar."

"Dear, dear," said the butcher's wife, kindly, "it is hard on you, Mr. Gully, that's true. Is there anything as we can do for you? I hope you are not much hurt."

"Not much," answered John, though he rubbed himself in a way that rather belied his words. "But I must creep round the corner and get another hat. I cannot go home in this thing, you know," holding up his battered and shapeless castor; "and, if you have anything like a clothes-brush, I'll try to make myself a little more presentable."

"Ay, that I have," said Mrs. Radley; "and there's one of your coat laps half-rent off; let me pin it up for you."

While this operation was going on a great shout was heard,

and people were seen running from every part of the square in the direction of the "Rainbow."

"What's up now, I wonder?" exclaimed the butcher. "I'll be hanged if they're not cheering somebody this time. Them's cheers, sure enough."

The butcher was right, they were cheering somebody, and that somebody was Red Ryvington.

Shortly after making his speech, Randle retired from the meeting, and he reached the inn door just as Gully jumped into the butcher's shop. The hands, by some means or other, had become acquainted with the purport of his remarks, and heard that he had refused to countenance the proceedings of the Ribbleton masters, or join in a lock-out; and his appearance was greeted with uproarious cheering.

"Hurrah for Red Ryvington!" shouted the crowd; "he's spoken up for th' poor folks. He willn't lock his hands out. He willn't pay nowt to the Ribbleton maysters."

"God bless his bonny face!" exclaimed the woman who had been so uncomplimentary about Gully's nose. "Give him three cheers moor, lads."

And three cheers more they gave him, Randle looking all the time greatly surprised, for he was far from expecting so warm a reception, or indeed any reception at all.

"Let's lift him up, lads. Let's carry him home," cried another voice; and, before the object of the ovation could enter a protest against the proceeding, a dozen strong fellows had taken him in their arms and raised him high above their heads.

"Come, come, lads," said Randle, when he had recovered from his surprise; "this will never do. Put me down. Come, now; the greatest kindness you can do me is to put me down. It's all nonsense to talk about carrying me home. Put me down, I tell you."

"Ay, we'll put you down," said the man nearest to him, a burly blacksmith; "but we'll take you across th' road fust, Mr. Red Ryvington, just to let th' folks see who's their friend. Come on, lads."

And, suiting the action to the word, they carried him, amid continued cheering, in the direction whither they had kicked and hustled John Gully ten minutes previously, and set him down not far from the butcher's shop.

Considerable excitement prevailed meanwhile in the masters' meeting. Most of those present were gathered about the windows, gazing curiously on the scene which was being enacted below.

"Yon's hoeful," exclaimed Mr. Stubbins, who, being both timid and hard of hearing, mistook the cheers for howls of

execration; "perfectly hoeful. If they are using Ryvington in that way, what will they do at me, I wonder? Are they going to murder him right out, do you think, or are they only going to throw him in th' brook, or hang him to a lamp-post, or something of that sort? I'll tell you what, gentlemen, I think we'd better creep out at th' back door. I know I shall."

But the masters were bolder than their chairman. They let him creep out at the back door alone; and before the meeting separated, notwithstanding Randle's defection, it was resolved to give notice on the following Friday of a general lock-out, provided that in the meantime the Ribbleton strikers did not return to work on their employers' terms.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

"How do you, do Mr. Ryvington?" said a voice at Randle's elbow—a voice which, though it struck strangely on his ear, seemed not unfamiliar to him—almost at the same moment as he was placed by his admirers on firm earth. "I am glad to see that you are so popular. You said rightly. If you were not good to your people, they would not make a hero of you."

Turning round in some surprise, Randle recognised in the pale face, dark eyes, and the white, gold-mounted teeth of the speaker, the well-remembered features of his cosmopolitan acquaintance of Lake Leman.

"God bless me! Mr. Kalougia, you here!"

"Did I not say I would come? I try always to be true to my word."

"You have been a long time about it, though. I had quite given you up. When did you arrive?"

"About an hour ago. I was just rambling round the town to see what sort of a place it is, when I beheld this crowd, and remained here to await—that is good English, I think—to await the issue of events. Are all your Lancashire artisans—your workmen—like those of Whitebrook, Mr. Ryvington?"

"Why, yes; I think they are all pretty much alike."

"*Ma foi!* they are a wonderful people, then. As I stood here I saw an unhappy gentleman kicked right across the street. He came flying, and jumped into this *boucherie*, so that I thought the poor man was killed; but he has just come out looking not much the worse. And then I hear a great cheering, and behold

Mr. Ryvington carried on men's shoulders like a conquering hero. What does it all signify?"

"I will tell you afterwards. Excuse me just now; I want to get out of this. They are actually cheering again, the fools. I hate to be made conspicuous in this way," said Randle, as he took Kalougia's arm and led him from the crowd. "You will go home with me, of course? Where have you left your things?"

"You are very kind. Yes, I shall accompany you with pleasure, if it is quite convenient; and my things, they are at the station."

"Of course it is quite convenient. And are you not here in answer to my invitation? We will go to the 'White Bear,' where I have left my drag, and, after we have called at the station for your luggage, we will drive to Redscar. My brother is here, but he goes home on horseback."

Randle felt really glad to see Kalougia, and the invitation was as cordially given as it was kindly meant, for the circumstances in which he had first met Kalougia had made a lasting impression on his mind. There was, nevertheless, some mental questioning as to the expediency of taking home with him and introducing to his family and friends a man whom he had seen only once before, and touching whose antecedents and position he was completely in the dark. It was not, he admitted to himself, a very prudent thing to do. But he had a shrewd eye for character. He knew that Kalougia was well-educated and highly intelligent, and there could be little doubt, he thought, that both by birth and breeding he was a gentleman. His manners, moreover, were pleasant, his personal appearance was striking and attractive; his mobile face, in moments of repose, might almost be described as saintly; and there was a nameless something about the man which suggested that he had gone through great trouble, a something that attracted Randle's sympathy as much as it piqued his curiosity.

But, whatever the Russian might be, Randle had offered him the hospitality of Redscar, and he had no alternative but to make his offer good and play the part of host to the best of his ability. He was glad, however, that his mother was still at the seaside, whither she had gone a few weeks previously with Dora. She liked always to have ample notice of the coming of a guest, and she did not get on very well with strangers. The idea of entertaining a foreigner would almost have appalled her. It was well, therefore, that Kalougia should be installed at Redscar before her return.

As they drove homeward, Randle explained to his guest the meaning of the scene they had just witnessed.

"*Ma foi!* it is true what I said. You are a wonderful

people, and your workpeople they have a spirit. Why, in a continental city—or at any rate in Russia or in Germany—a disturbance like that would have frightened the authorities out of their senses. They would have seen in it the beginning of the end. The garrison would have been called under arms, the place declared in a state of siege, and a thousand people arrested. Yes, your workmen have a spirit; they are bold fellows.”

“I don’t think they showed much spirit in kicking poor Gully across the street, though. A very cowardly thing, I call it.”

“It was rough, certainly; but I do not think they meant to harm him much. As you say, however, it does not need great pluck for five hundred men to kick one. It is not very chivalrous, and I do not admire your workmen for that. What I admire is their spirit in defying their masters, and supporting the others who are out on strike.”

“Your sympathies are on the side of the working people, I think.”

“They are. Oh, my friend, I have seen them so crushed, so down-trodden, so spiritless, that when I witness a scene like that of to-day it makes me think I am in another world.”

“You speak of Russia, of course?”

“Of Russia. Many thousands of our peasants are always on the brink of starvation. They live on food that your English dogs would refuse to eat; every year hundreds and thousands die of hunger. And in our factories—for we have some factories in Russia—the people work fourteen hours a day for just enough to keep body and soul together. You should see the houses where live the silk weavers of Moscow.”

“Do you mean hand-loom weavers?”

“Yes, I mean hand-loom weavers. They weave the most costly stuffs, you know, with beautiful patterns, like those at Lyons?”

“Then they are jacquard weavers?”

“Exactly; they are jacquard weavers. Well, these poor wretches who work this rich material live in filthy dens not worthy to be called houses, and there they are night and day, working and sleeping. And they sleep where they work; their loom is their only bed.”

“Their only bed their loom!” exclaimed Randle. “How can anybody sleep on a loom? Have you ever seen a loom, Mr. Kalogria?”

“I have seen a loom, Mr. Ryvington. These looms I speak of are large, square machines. At each corner is a column, a pillar; on these pillars are arranged boards, and on these boards sleep the weavers.”

"Ah, I see; the poor beggars sleep over their looms, not on them. That is what they call protecting native industry, I suppose. I have always thought, and what you say confirms it, that the tendency of protective systems, like that of Russia, is to make the rich richer and the poor poorer."

"It is so," said Kalougia, simply. "Ah, Mr. Ryvington, it is very sad, and our lower orders are so debased, so ignorant, that it is almost impossible to make them raise a little their heads. They believe, poor wretches, that those whom they support by their labour are their benefactors, and kiss the hand that smites them. The Tsar, who takes every year three or four million pounds of their money for his pleasures, his mistresses, and his favourites, and wastes the substance and lives of his people in foreign wars—in which they have no interest—they look upon as an earthly deity. Ah, if they had only a little of your English pluck! But tell me, please, if that gentleman the people so much kicked just now had been a great man—a noble, for instance—would they still have kicked him?"

"Yes. I think if John Gully had been even a duke, and they had taken him for a Ribbleton master, he would have been kicked all the same."

"*Tant mieux.* So much the better."

"God bless me! Mr. Kalougia, what do you mean by saying so much the better? Do you think it is right for a crowd of people to set on a single man—whether he be a tailor or a duke—and beat him perhaps to death?"

"I do not mean in that sense. I think that would be very bad. Yet, bad as it might be, I would rather see it than see as I have seen in my own country (if I may still call a country mine in which I am not permitted to live), and it is of daily occurrence there—a man kissing the hand of a master by whom he has just been flogged. What think you of that, Mr. Ryvington—which is the more degrading to humanity?"

"Well, if you put it in that way, I think I prefer the kicking. It was a barbarous sort of thing, certainly; but it was an exception, and the hands are a good deal excited just now. Anyhow, they are not slaves; they would not stand much flogging, you may be sure of that; and, like you, I would rather have independence, even with an occasional outburst of ruffianism, than cringing servility. I do not wonder that your sympathies are with the poorer classes of your own countrymen, if they are so badly off as you say."

"Yes, my sympathies are with the poor and lowly. And there are other countries than Russia where the hewers of wood and drawers of water are no better off. In Galicia, in Austrian Poland, though the peasants are pretty well-to-do, the labourers

can scarcely exist. They must work sixteen hours a day, and their pay is little more than threepence of your money. And in Italy I think it is almost worse. Since you were in Switzerland I have travelled in Italy, and I have seen with my own eyes. The brigandage, the secret thieving societies of that country, the *Mafei* and the *Camorra*, they are caused by misery and misgovernment. People think Italy is a country of peasant proprietors. It is not; it is a country of great landowners and starving labourers. In Apulia a labourer must work thirteen, fourteen, fifteen hours a day to gain threepence-halfpenny. He lives on black bread, and sleeps on a sack of straw. In Lombardy, where I have also been, one of the most fertile districts in Europe, the condition of the peasants is almost equally deplorable. Their food is also black bread, and a horrible soup, made of the dust of rice, a handful of haricots, and a few drops of rancid oil, and sometimes a morsel of bacon. Though Italy is so rich in cattle that she sends every year thousands of beeves over the Alps into Switzerland and France, the peasants of Lombardy never eat meat. Though the land is covered with vineyards they never drink wine. The father of a family may earn, perhaps, eightpence a day. His wife, when she can go out into the field, may earn also a few pence. But the women are old before their time. At thirty-five, if they live so long, they are bowed and wrinkled; and grey-haired, like women of seventy. Perhaps it is better so; lives that are full of sorrow cannot be too short. And the hovels they live in, Mr. Ryvington, they are worse than the cabins of those miserable Irish peasants I have read about. A rough wooden shed without door or chimney, unlighted and unpaved—that is all. And they are decimated by a terrible disease called the *pellagra*, a wasting fever engendered by privation and overwork, of which thousands perish every year, even under the shadow of one of the most glorious buildings ever raised by man for the worship of God, the cathedral of Milan. There is frightful misery in Russia, but Russia has a hard climate and an ungrateful soil. It has been reserved for Italy to show how the richest gifts of nature can be most perverted; to solve the problem how those who till the most fertile soil in Europe, by whose labours all live, may be maintained on the smallest modicum of its produce. No wonder that there are Socialists in such countries, Mr. Ryvington."

"Are you a socialist?" asked Randle, who was even more impressed by the earnestness of his companion's manner than by the matter of his remarks.

"I am nothing now, Mr. Ryvington, a mere outsider. But when I was in Russia I belonged to the revolutionary socialist party. I am afraid, however, my friends would look upon me as

an apostate, if they knew how much my views have changed since I have seen other countries than Russia."

"Revolutionary socialist," said Randle; "that means that you were a Nihilist, I suppose."

"None of the Russian revolutionary parties call themselves Nihilists. It is a name applied to them by Tourgenieff in one of his novels; but they do not acknowledge it."

"Let us say revolutionary socialists, then. What are their principles—what do they aim at?"

"Political revolution and social anarchy."

"Anarchy!"

"Yes, the abolition of all existing institutions, including government and private property."

"Comprehensive, certainly; but what would they put in their places?"

"What they call Collectivity. Society, they think, would spontaneously reconstitute itself on the principle of one for all, and all for one. Workmen would organise themselves in groups, according to their trades, and labour for their common benefit. No one would ever want work or bread; for the produce of labour would be distributed fairly amongst the labourers; and as trade societies all over Europe would be affiliated to each other, there could never be a glut of labour in any particular trade; frontiers and standing armies would cease to exist, and Europe become one great confederation."

"But all that implies organisation, government, laws."

"Collective anarchists do not think so. They believe that, ancient institutions once swept away, all the rest would come, come spontaneously. There might be some little confusion and disorder at first, perhaps, but out of the chaos would be evolved a new and better order, a society in which there would be neither oppressor or oppressed, neither rich nor poor, neither capitalists nor proletariat, neither luxury nor misery."

"And they really think, these collective anarchists, as you call them, that if the bonds of society were unloosened, and capitalists, employers, and so forth, abolished, people, without any sort of compulsion; or discipline, and solely on their own initiation, would unite in the way you describe, and work fairly and conscientiously for themselves and each other?"

"That was Bakounine's idea, an idea, however, that he borrowed from Prudhon, and Bakounine was the apostle of the Russian communistic movement."

"Bakounine must have been very ignorant of human nature then; and I am sure of one thing, he never had a lot of hands to manage."

"He had the courage of his convictions, though. He spent

eight years of his life in prisons, and four years in Siberia; yet his ardour for the redemption of the proletariat, and his faith in the ultimate triumph of the communistic cause, never wavered."

"That only proves he was an enthusiast."

"More than that, he was a fanatic. And, without the aid of enthusiasts and fanatics, no great revolution was ever achieved. The early Christians, the Crusaders, the Protestant martyrs, Cromwell and his Ironsides, the leaders of the great French revolution—all were enthusiasts and fanatics; but what would have been the world without them?"

"But enthusiasm must have a motive, an inspiration. What is the inspiration of your communists?"

"The cause of humanity, the abolition of inequalities, the extinction, as far as may be compatible with physical conditions, of poverty, misery, and crime, the union of all mankind in one great brotherhood, the accomplishment of the aspiration uttered nearly two thousand years ago that all nations of the earth may dwell together in unity. And why should it not be, Mr. Ryvington? This mother earth on which it is our lot to dwell has room in her great bosom for all her children. She yields food enough to feed all, fibrous plants enough to clothe all, stones and timber enough to house all. There are places enough for all at the banquet of life. Why, then, should not all live, if not in ease, at least in plenty? Is it in the nature of things, or is it because of bad laws and an imperfect social organisation, that, while a chosen few, most of whom produce nothing, eat their fill, and waste even more than they eat, the vast majority of mankind, by whose labour all are fed, must eat only the crumbs that fall from the table, must starve in hovels that others may grow fat in palaces?"

"I see," rejoined Randle, with a smile, "you want to make everybody happy. And a very good thing too; but how will you go about it? That is the question. To begin with, you cannot make folks happy whether they will or not. You talk about extinguishing poverty. Well, in this country, whatever it may be in others, the chief causes of poverty are idleness, shiftlessness, and drunkenness. Tell me how to get rid of these. Persuade people to be industrious, self-helpful, and sober, and I will answer for the extinction of poverty, or at any rate of pauperism."

"Ah, Mr. Ryvington, are you quite sure of that? Those poor Italian labourers I spoke of just now are all that you say, yet they can hardly earn enough to keep body and soul together; and there are thousands and thousands of our Russian peasants who are constantly on the verge of starvation—not because they are idle or drunken, not because the earth does not bring forth its

fruit in due season—but because of the heavy burdens laid on them by the State, and by their old masters, the men whose slaves they once were. Bad laws, not, as you say, lack of industry or thrift, is the cause of their sufferings.”

“I was speaking of England. Our laws are imperfect in many ways, I know, but I do not think you can call them altogether bad. And there are some of us—we call ourselves Liberals—who are constantly striving to get them made better. It is slow work, I know, but we are always making a little progress, and we have a proverb in these parts that says, ‘Slow and sure go far in a day.’”

“That is all very well, but you make no attempt to organise labour.”

“We do better than that, Mr. Kalougia,” said Randle, as he pulled up his horse at the lodge gates at Redscar House. “We let labour organise itself.”

“That is the *laissez faire*—the let alone system; and if you will consider the present condition of the proletariat on the Continent, and even in your own country, you must, I think, acknowledge that this system is anything but a success.”

“What can you suggest better,” asked Randle, “that will work? What remedy is there that would not be worse than the disease?”

Before Kalougia could reply, they were at the front door, and the bustle of descending from the drag, getting out the baggage, and the rest, checked the answer which he would doubtless have made.

“Anything from the counting-house for me?” asked Randle of the servant who admitted him, after the Russian had been shown to his room.

“Yes, sir, three letters and a telegram.”

The telegram was from his mother, saying that she intended to return on the following afternoon, and asking that somebody might meet her at Whitebrook Station at an hour which she named. Dora, she added, would accompany her, and stay a few days with them at Redscar.

Shortly afterwards Robert arrived, and they had high tea, which Kalougia, whose tastes seemed to be of the simplest, said he greatly preferred to dinner. The evening was spent in desultory conversation, chiefly concerning the places Kalougia had visited—for he had travelled much—and the manners and customs of his countrymen but he said little about himself, and no further mention was made of the subjects which had engaged the attention of Randle and himself on their way from Whitebrook.

CHAPTER XXXII.

KALOUGIA MAKES A SUGGESTION.

At breakfast next morning, the time for which at Redscar House was eight o'clock, an hour or more after the brothers had made their first visit to the factory, Randle asked his visitor if he would like to look round the mills.

Kalougia declared that nothing would please him better. He took a great interest, he said, in every sort of industry.

"Have you ever seen a cotton factory?" inquired Randle.

"Yes," answered the Russian, with a smile, "I have seen several in Russia—at Moscow."

"I am glad of that. You shall tell me what you think of our concern, compared with those you saw at Moscow."

Randle took his guest first through the factory most recently built, an establishment constructed and fitted up on the newest and most approved principles. The rooms were large and well lighted, the engines and other machinery almost brand new, and everything seemed to be working with the regularity of clock-work. All this excited Kalougia's admiration, but what appeared most to please him was the provision made for the comfort of the hands. For those who could not go home to their meals there was a comfortable dining-room; facilities were provided for cooking their food; there were cloak-rooms, where, while at work, they could leave their superfluous garments. There was a library, too, and Randle informed his visitor that a workman's club and a reading-room had been opened in the village.

"But that is their own affair," observed Randle. "The hands have taken a couple of cottages, for which they pay full rent. I did nothing but fit them up. They manage and support the club entirely themselves. And it is better so. I do not approve of treating hands as if they were children."

"And how is it organised?"

"Just like any other club. There is a small entrance fee, and a subscription of so much a month. What the members drink they pay for, of course."

"They can have drink, then? I have heard something of these workmen's clubs before, but I thought they were all teetotal places."

"Ours is not, and if it were, I do not think it would succeed. One of my friends, who is a great teetotaler, wanted me to use my influence to make it a temperance concern, but I refused. I don't believe in forcing people to be this or that; teach as much as you like by precept and example, but no compulsion. And a club is not a tavern. It should be a man's own house, where he

can drink or not, as he likes. At an inn he must drink, or he will not be allowed to stay; drinking is the condition of admittance. And really I do not see any objection to a spinner or a weaver, when his work is done, enjoying his glass of beer, if he prefers it to tea or coffee, smoking a pipe, and having a social chat with his neighbours."

"Chat? Chat? What is that?"

"A talk; 'camping,' they call it here."

"But tell me, Mr. Ryvington, are not your people terrible drinkers? We Russians are bad enough, but, from all accounts, you English are still worse."

"Well, there is room for improvement, I daresay; but you must not believe all you hear. We are far from being a sober people, and it would be greatly to the advantage of our working classes, both in pocket and in health, if they were to drink less, and I should be glad enough to see them all teetotalers. But nothing is to be gained by exaggeration, and I do most firmly believe, and my belief is based on something more solid than fancy, that, man for man, our artisans consume less drink than any similar class on the Continent; and if fewer temptations were thrown in their way, they would drink so little that temperance societies would almost find their occupation gone. I can give you a proof. When this club was opened I shut up the public-house we used to have here in the village. It belonged to us, and I did not think there was any further necessity for it. Well, there are three hundred members of the club, they have drink always at command, and yet since it was started, more than a year ago, there has not been one case of drunkenness or misbehaviour. What do you think of that, now?"

"It confirms an opinion I have long held, that workmen can exercise more self-restraint, and have a greater capacity for organisation, than the world gives them credit for."

"Oh, they can organise. There is no mistake about that. Look at the co-operative stores. We have a very good one here, managed entirely by the hands. And some of the trade societies, too, are very well managed."

"What do you think would happen, now, Mr. Ryvington, if you were to give this mill and all it contains to your *employés*, and tell them to work it for their own benefit?"

"Upon my word, Mr. Kalougia, that is a possibility that has never occurred to me, and I do not think it is likely to come to pass, unless," added Randle, with a smile, "you anarchists get the upper hand, you know."

"I am not an anarchist, Mr. Ryvington; but never mind that now. I only put the question hypothetically. I merely wanted to know what you thought would happen in the event I suggested."

"Confusion. How could a property like this be transferred to a promiscuous lot of hands? If you transferred it to the adult men only, you would exclude the majority, for the majority consists of women and children. If, on the other hand, you included women, you would give an unfair advantage to a man with a wife and two or three grown-up daughters. And families are so broken up, one member working at one place and trade, and another at another, that you could not hand it over to them. Supposing even you got over that difficulty, though I do not see how you could, how would you deal with the share of a workman, or a workwoman, who died or went away; on what principle would you divide the profits, or apportion the losses? Then there are the questions of discipline and management. The managers and overlookers would be elected by the hands, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," said Kalougia.

"Well, do you think that managers and overlookers, chosen by the hands, and dependent on them for their places, either could or would maintain that order, discipline, and close supervision over individuals without which the whole thing would come to an end in a twelvemonth?"

"Don't you think that the consciousness that they were working for themselves—for their own exclusive benefit—would render close supervision of the workpeople unnecessary, that they would do voluntarily all that they now do under compulsion?"

"They have that consciousness now. They are paid, most of them, by results. The harder they work the more they gain. Yet we have to enforce punctual attendance by penalties, and attention to work by constant watchfulness. Now, do you think—can any sensible man think who knows what hands are—that the possibility of receiving a few shillings at the end of the year or half-year in addition to their wages would serve as a substitute for discipline? If they were all sensible, sober, and middle-aged, it might be so. But they are not. Many of them are just the reverse, in fact, and the young and the careless will not sacrifice present pleasure for future benefits. The wild schemes you have been telling me about, for making everybody equal and happy, are just dreams, the dreams of men who have no practical acquaintance with affairs, and, to speak plainly, don't know what they are talking about."

"You have hit a real blot there, Mr. Ryvington. It is true that Russian Communists are nearly all pure theorists; they have never had any political training, but that is not their fault. Nobody in Russia outside the official class possesses any political influence, or can exercise any political function. Without the permission of some board, official, or department, we can do nothing save what is strictly our own personal business. These

workmen's clubs, for instance, would not be allowed. The authorities would see in them something subversive and revolutionary, and, if they did not forbid them to begin with, would suppress them afterwards. Even a co-operative store could not be started without a concession which, if it were obtained at all, could be obtained only at a ruinous cost."

"Cost! Why should it cost anything?"

"Because the Russian official class is utterly corrupt, from top to bottom, and you can get nothing without paying for it. I can give you an instance. Once at St. Petersburg an acquaintance of mine came to me with a new idea which he asked my help to carry out. He had discovered that dealers in old clothes cheat their customers—all poor people, for only poor people buy second-hand garments—frightfully. Their profits average I do not know how many hundred per cent. Well, my friend's idea was to start an old clothes society, with branches in several parts of the city. He proposed to buy second-hand things outright, and resell them at a moderate profit, or accept them as consignments for sale on commission, charging only just enough to cover expenses. He was a poor fellow without money of his own, but a banker had promised to find whatever capital might be necessary, and he wanted me to lay the project before the Minister of the Interior and obtain his sanction."

"And do you mean to say that a pure matter of business like that cannot be put through without Government leave?"

"Yes; the Russian system is just the reverse of yours. Here everything not expressly forbidden is allowed; in Russia, everything not expressly allowed is forbidden. It is even forbidden to an unauthorised person, under pain of imprisonment, to teach another to read. Well, I went to the minister. He listened to what I had to say with the greatest interest, expressed warm sympathy with my friend's motives, and approved of his scheme. But he must consult with the Minister of Commerce, he said. There are a great many old clothes dealers in St. Petersburg, and it would not do to ruin them all right off. He would communicate with me further in a few days. In a few days, accordingly, rather to my surprise, for I had expected a much longer delay, I was requested to call at the minister's office, when I should learn from one of his secretaries under what conditions the concession would be granted. What do you suppose they were?"

"That the old clothes dealers must be compensated for the loss of their business?"

"No," said Kalougia, dryly, "that was not it at all. The minister cared no more for the old clothes dealers than the Ojibbeway Indians. That was merely a pretext. The conditions were that the minister should have fifty per cent. of the profits,

and the office (his chief secretary and two or three others) twenty-five."

"Well, what did you say to that?"

"I went and informed my friend, the projector of the scheme. Of course he had to give it up; for, as the banker who had undertaken to provide the capital demanded forty per cent. in the shape of interest, he would have had to pay to one and another all the profits and fifteen per cent. more."

"But why did not you expose the beggars; write to the papers, and make a row—complain to the Emperor even?"

"My friend, we knew better. The papers would not have published our letters, and even if the Tsar had believed our story, which is very unlikely, and dismissed the minister, his successor would have done just the same. And if the Russian government dislikes one thing more than another it is disagreeable truths, and they are apt to make it very unpleasant for those who draw attention to them. The Governor of Tomboff was recalled a short time ago for reporting that there had been a failure of crops in his province, and that, unless means were taken to prevent it, a famine was inevitable. Only the other day the chief of the Third Section reprimanded several newspaper editors for stating that the work-people in a certain town were badly fed and lodged; and the press is strictly forbidden to make any allusion whatever to the condition of the peasants, which in several governments is wretched beyond description."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Randle, "what a country! I am sure, if I had the ill-luck to be a Russian, I, too, should be a revolutionist."

"Ah, but you do not know the worst, Mr. Ryvington," said Kalougia, bitterly. "What do you think of people being arrested without cause, and kept for years in prison without trial; of men acquitted by a jury being sent to hard labour in Siberian mines; of Old Believers, merely because they dissent from the National Church, being confined in a fortress for a quarter of a century?"

"But, Mr. Kalougia, can these things be? Excuse me for seeming to cast a doubt on your statements, but really they are so very strange as to be hard to believe."

"They may seem so to you, Mr. Ryvington; but they are only too true, and I have not told you the worst. The Russians are not naturally a rebellious people, they are gentle and long-suffering; and only unbearable tyranny and oppression have turned so many of us into revolutionists. For years past the reign of the Tsar has been a reign of terror, and I am afraid it will have a terrible ending. It has created Nihilism, and by mere force of persecution converted an organisation originally

peaceful into an organisation for repaying terror with terror. Oh, I could tell you many things that would surprise you still more—perhaps another time, if you would like. But now I am keeping you from your duties. You have your business to attend to, and we have not finished our inspection of your mill.”

“Well, perhaps we had better be going on,” said Randle, in a voice full of sympathy, for there was a sadness in the Russian’s manner that deeply affected him, “though I could go on listening to you all morning. I should like, another time, if you have no objection, to hear something about yourself; how you got mixed up with these revolutionary societies, and what you did to get sent out of the country.”

“I will tell you with pleasure, Mr. Ryvington, all about myself. You have a right to be told, for have you not, in receiving into your house one of whom you know nothing, except that he is a poor political refugee, done me a kindness which I shall never forget and can never repay!”

“Oh, never mind that; it is nothing.”

“I beg your pardon, it is a great deal. I had heard that Englishmen were reserved and haughty, but you are neither; and if ever—”

“Never mind that,” repeated Randle, with a deprecatory smile. “About your story; will you tell us it to-night?”

“Gladly.”

“My mother and cousin—the young lady I called to see at Nyon, you remember—are coming home this afternoon, and I dare say will form a part of your audience. And now I will take you through a few more of the rooms, after which I will show you my laboratory and workshop.”

As they went through one of the spinning rooms, containing some 8,000 spindles, Kalongia remarked on the largeness of the mules and the fewness of the hands who “minded” them.

“How many spindles to a side have you?” he asked Randle.

“Sixteen hundred to a pair of mules.”

“And how many people have you to look after them?”

“As you see—one big piecer and two little ones.”

“Why, in a Russian mill for this size of machine they would require at least a dozen. The—what do you call it?—the space between these spinning mules—”

“The wheelhouse,” suggested Randle.

“Thank you. I did not know how you called it in English. The wheelhouse would be crowded with men and boys; and I think machinery here goes at a much greater speed than in Russia. What counts are you spinning here—forties?”

“Not far off,” said Randle, greatly surprised at this manifestation of Kalongia’s knowledge of spinning. “Those wheels

are on thirty-sixes. You seem to have some knowledge of the cotton trade?"

"A little. I once worked a few months in a cotton mill, near Moscow."

"Worked in a cotton mill!" exclaimed Randle, in astonishment. "What as?"

"Not as a self-actor minder," answered the Russian, whom the perplexity depicted in Randle's countenance seemed rather to amuse. "I could not piece one of these threads to save my life. My work was carpentering, and in going about the mill I managed to pick up a few facts; that is all."

"Carpentering! Well, you are the most remarkable carpenter I ever saw."

This remark made Kalongia laugh.

"Wait until I tell you my story," he said, "and you shall hear how I became a carpenter in a cotton mill."

After they had completed their inspection of the factory, Randle took his guest to his own workroom and laboratory, and explained to him what he was trying to accomplish. He seemed greatly interested, and after half an hour's conversation Randle had to admit to himself that the Russian's knowledge of electricity and its capabilities was superior to his own, and when Kalongia volunteered to assist him in his experiments he gladly accepted the offer, and they began forthwith a series of trials which occupied them the greater part of the day.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TWISTER'S FIRST CHAMPAGNE.

In the course of the morning Robert came into the laboratory to consult his brother about something.

"Who is going to meet mother and Dora?" asked Bob, when the business was concluded.

"Let Duffield go. Tell him he must take the carriage and be at the station in time for the 5.30 train. And now when I think of it, Bob, you had better go with him."

"Why? This is a busy day, Randle, and I really do not see the necessity. Duffield will do quite well."

"So he would in ordinary circumstances. But you know how fidgety mother is. She will worry herself in any case; but if she only learns when she gets here that we have a stranger in the house she will be in a——"

"Fearful fume," interposed Bob. "I understand. I will go and prepare her for the worst. It won't take me long."

"But look here now, you young scapegrace, I will not have her frightened."

"All right, Ran, you may trust me to soothe her; I'll stroke her down the right way," rejoined the junior partner, gravely, but with a mischievous gleam in his eye that rather belied his words.

"Take care you do, then. And as you are going into town you might call at the 'Rainbow' or Twister's, and ask if they have heard what the hands are going to do—whether they will give in or be locked out."

"In that case I'll start a few minutes earlier and look in at the 'Rainbow,'" answered Robert; "it's always the best shop for news."

"I wish I had not mentioned the 'Rainbow,'" said Randle to himself, as his brother left the laboratory. "I am afraid he is getting rather too fond of the 'Rainbow.'"

Bob started nearly an hour sooner than he needed to have done in order to be at the station in time to meet his mother and Dora. He liked driving almost as well as riding, and the only part of a carriage where he felt really content was on the box. So, seating himself beside Duffield, he took the reins and drove straight to the "Rainbow."

"Walk the horses about a while, and be back here ten minutes before the train is due," he said to the coachman, as he was about to spring from his seat. "I shall not be long."

He walked straight into the bar, a spacious and comfortable room, where he found, as he expected, several young and old manufacturers drinking bitter beer and eating bread and cheese, and two or three town gossips, whose favourite tipples seemed to be whisky, "cold without." Among the former was Mr. Twister, a leading member of the Masters' Association, upon whom Randle had suggested that his brother should call to obtain information concerning the impending lock-out.

A tall, good-looking man was posing before the fireplace with legs wide apart, a walking-stick in one hand and a glass in the other. His eye was heavy and his countenance gloomy, and as Bob entered he greeted him with a solemn nod and a melancholy smile.

The nodder was Harry Hopps, the eldest son of a local brewer of large means and considerable influence, whom rumour had marked out as a future candidate for the borough on the Liberal side. It was whispered, too, that if the son had been "steady" his father would have liked him "to try his luck with Miss Ryvington." But the former's steadiness was unfortunately

subject to frequent lapses. Bob saw at a glance that Harry was several days gone in one of his periodical "sprees." At the beginning of his orgies young Hopps was boisterous and drank champagne, which at such times he declared he could drink in bucketsful. "Fiz" would be followed by spirits, and the third and last stage of the "spree" was devoted exclusively to beer, which he took by way of sobering himself. He generally finished up at the "Rainbow," where he would stand, as Bob saw him, with his back to the fireplace for a whole day, hardly ever speaking, and never sitting down. He even ordered fresh supplies of beer by a gesture. In these moods he was rather apt to be mischievous, and sometimes played pranks with his walking-stick that cost him dear. Notwithstanding Harry Hopps's "spreeing" propensities, he was credited with good business capacity, and had inherited from his father a turn for money-making—the final test of merit at Whitebrook. Though his "boils," as the hands called them, sometimes lasted a fortnight, he only "broke out" on the average about every three months: and "spreeing," providing it did not become chronic and lead to neglect of business, was regarded by public opinion rather as a venial sin than a serious fault. Between his outbreaks, moreover, Mr. Hopps never touched alcohol in any shape, even in the shape of his own beer. If he was an occasional drunkard, he more than balanced the account, his neighbours thought, by being an intermittent teetotaler.

A few minutes after Bob had taken a seat and ordered a glass of bitter beer, and before he had found an opportunity of asking for the information which it was his object to procure, Mr. Twister, whose acquaintance the reader made in a previous chapter, related a little personal anecdote that seemed vastly to amuse his hearers. Twister, though he could write a well-expressed and correctly-spelt letter, and was probably worth £200,000, spoke broad Lancashire on principle. He spoke it even on the bench of which he was one of the local ornaments. The terms in which he invariably pronounced sentence on delinquent drunkards who were brought before him for judgment—"I am very sorry for thee, my lad, but thou must pay five shillings and costs"—and a habit of profane swearing, had procured for him the nickname of "Owd Five-shilling-and-cosses" (curses).

The subject of conversation when Bob joined the company was the appropriate one of drink, with, as it seemed, special reference to champagne.

"I can weel mind me," said Mr. Twister, "of th' time as I fost tasted champagne. It wor just after dinner, and I wor busy i' th' warehouse looking cuts [calico pieces], when th' wife come in and towd me—we lived close to th' factory i' them times—as

th' boots fro th' 'Rainbow' had browt word as Mr. Farrow, of Farrow and Smith, fro Manchester, wor theer, and wanted to see me. They wor good customers o' mine then, wor Farrow and Smith, and they're good customers yet, so I washed and donned mysel and seet off fost thing. We wor wanting some yell yarn [heald yarn] and gowd thread, and I thowt I could kill two birds wi' one stone and order 'em as I coom back. I fun Mr. Farrow upstairs theer, i' th' 'Wellington.' There wor Sykes and Hollins, and two or three moor wi' him, and they wor drinking some stuff as fizzed, out o' glasses i' th' shape of a bell turned upside down.

"Will you take a glass of champagne with us, Mr. Twister?" sez Mr. Farrow, after we'd shaken hands and tow'd one another what a fine day it wor.

"Thank you kindly," I sez, 'it's a soort o' liquor as I never tasted—to tell th' truth, I could never begrudge th' price on't—but as yo're standing treat I willn't say nay.'

"Wi' that he filled me a glass.

"What do you think of that now, Mr. Twister?" he axed.

"It's not bad," I sez; 'tastes to me like a superior soort o' pop [gingerbeer]; but there's not much strength in it. I think I could go on supping stuff like this aw day and be no waur for it.'

"I'd no sooner spoken than he ordered another bottle in, and we supped that; then another, and we supped that; and we went on supping till I bethought me o' my yell yarn and gowd thread, and said I mun be going. So, after shaking hands wi' Mr. Farrow and t' others, off I went. I geet downstairs reyt enough, though it seemed somehow as there wor moor on 'em than when I went up. But when I geet on to that big flag, at t' top o' th' steps outside theer, it set agate a-going up and down to that end as I'd to howd on to th' railings to keep fro falling flat o' my face. Then I knew what wor up. I wor gradely drunk; and I wor that shamed as I should ha' gotten drunk by dayleet as I didn't know what to do, and I pyked off huom by all th' back streets as I could find. It wouldn't ha' done to go in at th' front door i' th' state I wor in, so I crept round by Blackamoor Loin and geet o'er a wall as there is into a field at th' back o' th' house. It wor a biggish wall, and I went into th' field heyd fost, just like a chap diving, and knocked such a lump on it as I couldn't put my hat on for welly a week after. There wor a long flight o' steps to our back door wheer we lived then, and, if yo'll believe me, I could no moor ha' walked up 'em than I could ha' flown to th' moon. So I crawled up 'em on my hands and knees. When I'd gotten about hoaf way up th' wife coom to th' door,

“ ‘What’s to do?’ hoo axed.

“ ‘Cornt [cannot] thou see?’ I sez.

“ Well, hoo coom and helped me up and geet me to bed, and I lay there th’ most part o’ two days, and I wor that peyled [peeled] about th’ heyd and face as I couldn’t show mysel i’ the town for a week after.

“ That wor th’ fust time as I tasted champagne, and I shall not soon forget it, I con tell yo. It wor no sham for me. I’ve never been as drunk or as drunken sick, either afore or sin, and——”

The conclusion of Mr. Twister’s remarks was lost in a tremendous crash. With a single movement of his stick, Mr. Hopps had swept every glass and bottle from the table on to the floor, a proceeding which seemed highly to amuse some of the bibbers in the bar.

“ That’s the way Hopps does when he’s going to stand treat,” observed a veteran customer of the “ Rainbow.” “ What has it to be, I wonder ? ”

The gentleman in question, who had resumed his position before the fireplace, looked on the smash with an unmoved countenance, and pointing with his stick to the shattered glasses, and nodding to the barmaid, uttered two words, “ Six shams.”

A few minutes afterwards six bottles of champagne and twice as many glasses were placed on the table which Mr. Hopps had cleared in so summary a fashion.

“ I suppose you want us to drink your ’ealth, Mr. Hopps ? ” asked the veteran, regarding the six bottles with a thirsty leer.

Mr. Hopps nodded.

“ All right ; we’ll drink it with much pleasure. But you’ll take a glass with us, won’t you, Mr. Hopps ? ”

The gentleman addressed shook his head, and pointed to his beer as if to signify that he was on a strict regimen of malt liquor, and therefore all but a teetotaler.

“ Mr. Hopps means well,” observed a second veteran customer, “ and he is always generous in his cups ; but it is not everybody as understands his ways. Last time he was having a fling he cleared the table as he has done now, and a lot of beer went over a cotton broker from Liverpool, messed his shirt front, and played the hangment with his white breeches. I think I never saw a chap so mad in all my life. Before anybody could have said ‘ Jack Robinson ’ he had jumped up and knocked Mr. Hopps down.”

“ And served him quite right,” said Bob, *sotto voce*. “ And what did Hopps do ? ”

“ He lay where he fell. He could not have picked himself

up to save his life. They had to fetch a cab and send him home."

Robert took occasion, while the wine was being poured out, to inquire of Mr. Twister if he had heard what the hands were going to do.

"Ay, they are going to be stiff, and we're going to be stiff. The Masters' Committee has telegraphed from Ribbleton as nowt can be done—no compromise, you know; and we are all going to give notice of a lock-out to-neet."

"Your carriage is at the door, Mr. Ryvington," announced one of the attendant nymphs; and after drinking a second glass of champagne, Robert hurried from the bar.

As he went out he met his cousin Randle and Tom Cliviger.

"Hullo, Bob!" exclaimed the former, "you are exactly the man I want to see. Do you know when Dora is coming back?"

"In ten minutes. I am just going up to the station to meet her and my mother. She will not be at Deepdene to-day, though; she is going to stay with us a bit."

"All right. If I can find time to-morrow I'll call and see her. You have a visitor, I hear. Who is he?"

"A Russian," said Bob, who, being afraid that the train would be at the station before him, made his reply as short as possible, using the first words that occurred to him. "Friend of Ran's—awfully clever—very distinguished—knows every dead language and most of the living ones—tremendously scientific—great swell—awfully rich."

"A remarkable man, I am sure. I should like to make his acquaintance. Yes, I will certainly call at Redscar to-morrow."

"I expected that would draw him," muttered Bob, as he drove towards the station. "My cousin Randle had always a weakness for swells. It's hereditary, I suppose."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW BOB SOOTHED HIS MOTHER.

"You got the telegram, I suppose?" asked Mrs. Ryvington of her son, when they were seated in the carriage, Bob having gone inside to tell his mother the news.

"Of which my presence here is proof," answered Robert. "We did not expect you for several days yet. You came away rather in a hurry, I think."

"Yes, we were getting tired. Two months is a long time

to stay at the seaside. I might have stayed a little longer, though, if there had been a sound gospel preacher in the place; but there is not one, and the way they go on in some of the churches is really scandalous. The ministers behaved more like Roman Catholic priests than clergymen of the Church of England."

"Yes," said Dora, with a half smile, "we went to every church in Rockborough, and could not find one low enough; and then we went the round of the chapels. I think you liked that minister we heard in the Particular Baptist meeting-house, though, aunt?"

"Mr. Broadley. Yes, he knows the truth. But he has gone away, and won't be back for a month or more, or else we would have stayed another week. Is all going on right at home, Robert?"

"Admirably."

"The girls have been steady?"

"Could not have been steadier if your eye had been constantly upon them, mother."

"Are you sure they have not broken anything?"

"Well, now you speak of it, I believe I did hear last week something about a teacup being smashed."

"Which set? I hope it was not one of the blue china?"

"I am really afraid it was, mother."

"Dear, dear, that makes three broken in less than two years. They will all be gone soon," said Mrs. Ryvington, in a deeply-grieved voice, "and I have had that set ever since I was married. Do you know if Susan has changed the curtains in the green bedroom, as I told her before I went away?"

"Upon my word, mother, I cannot tell. Anyhow, the green bedroom has an occupant at present."

"The green room an occupant! What do you mean, Robert?"

"I mean that we have a visitor, and that he sleeps there."

"A visitor, and you have never let me know! Who is it?" asked Mrs. Ryvington, excitedly.

"Seeing that he only came yesterday, we could not very well have let you know, mother, unless we had telegraphed. He is a friend of Randle's—name, Kalougia. Randle made his acquaintance in Switzerland, and invited him over."

"What is he?"

"A Russian."

"A Russian!" repeated Mrs. Ryvington, with a look that could hardly have been more expressive of horror if her son had said a polar bear.

"Oh, I know now," said Dora, who seemed to have recovered

nearly all her wonted vivacity. "It is Randle's Nihilist. They met last year at Bouveret, and Randle asked him."

"A Nihilist! What is that?" asked Mrs. Ryvington, whose knowledge of foreign countries and their affairs was about on a par with that of an average French general. "Is it the same as a Russian?"

"Not quite. I don't think all Russians are Nihilists, though a good many are. Nihilists are something like Guy Fawkes, aunt, and the gunpowder plotters, only there are a good many more of them, and as they use dynamite instead of gunpowder they are much more dangerous."

"Is he very ferocious-looking, this Mr. Kalougia, Bob?"

"Oh, dear, no—at least not very," said Bob, deprecatingly, with the air of a man trying to make the best of a bad job. "I have seen worse-looking fellows than Kalougia."

"I hope you examined his luggage to see that he had no bombshells, or anything of that sort, in his possession. He might blow up the house, you know."

"I don't know anything about bombshells," rejoined Robert, with a gesture which seemed to imply that, although the contingency suggested by Dora had not occurred to him, there might, nevertheless, be something in it; "but he is very clever at electricity and chemistry, and he was working with Randle in the laboratory all this morning."

"And Randle has put a man like that into my best bedroom! Why we shall all be blown to atoms!" exclaimed poor Mrs. Ryvington, sinking back into her seat with a groan. She had always distrusted electricity as something incomprehensible and superhuman; but in combination with nihilism, chemistry, dynamite, and bombshells, she regarded it as nothing less than diabolic.

"Nonsense, mother! There is nothing to be alarmed about," said Bob, who thought the joke had gone far enough, and it was high time he began to stroke his mother "the right way." "Kalougia is very quiet, and pleasant spoken. Randle says he is very clever, and a thorough gentleman, and I am sure he looks like one."

But it was no use. Mrs. Ryvington refused to be reasoned out of her fears, and she entered her house fully expecting to be confronted with a fiend in human shape. Her elder son was there to meet her, but she was almost too nervous to answer his inquiries, and, after a hurried greeting, hastened to her room. Randle attributed his mother's agitation to the fatigue of her journey, and saying that a cup of tea would do her good, asked her to come down as quickly as possible, and ordered tea to be served in ten minutes.

Dora had much ado to pacify her aunt, and it was only by suggesting that Randle would be displeased if she manifested any repugnance to meet his guest that she succeeded in prevailing on her to go down to tea.

They found the three gentlemen awaiting them in the drawing-room; and when Mrs. Ryvington set eyes on Kalougia she was probably even more surprised than she would have been had he appeared in the traditional costume of Guy Fawkes, and armed to the teeth. Instead of the ferocious being her imagination had pictured, she saw before her a man of strikingly prepossessing appearance, with manners as gentle as those of a woman, and a voice of silvery sweetness. Dora, too, was surprised, for albeit she had not expected to find in her cousin's friend a Russian Guy Fawkes, she had an idea, derived probably from Mademoiselle Vientemps' school, that revolutionists without exception were uncouth creatures of Dantonian aspect and low breeding.

"Tea is ready, I believe," said Randle, after the introductions were over, as he offered his arm to Dora. "I am sure you are hungry; let us go to the dining-room."

Kalougia gave his arm to Mrs. Ryvington, and he was so quiet and kind, and spoke so nicely, as she observed afterwards, that she began to suspect Dora and Robert had been making fun of her; and her awe of Randle's friend wore away so fast that, before tea was over, she made bold to ask him if he was a married man.

"I have not that pleasure, Mrs. Ryvington," was Kalougia's answer. "And a wif, you know, a man without a country and home, would hardly do well to take a wife."

"Without a country. Why, I thought you were a Russian."

"So I am. But it is my misfortune to be contraband in my own country."

"He means, aunt," said Dora, who perceived that her aunt did not quite take in Kalougia's meaning, "that he is forbidden to enter Russia. Is it not so, Mr. Kalougia?"

"You are quite right, mademoiselle. I am, as you say, forbidden to enter the dominion of the Tsar."

"Supposing you did return," asked Dora, curiously, "what would happen?"

"I should be arrested, imprisoned, and probably sent to join my brother in Siberia," answered Kalougia.

"Oh," said Dora, compassionately, as if sorry for having suggested so painful a memory.

"Never mind about that, now, Dora," interposed Randle. "Mr. Kalougia has promised to tell me his story this evening—all about himself, you know—and if you would like to hear it,

and he is agreeable, he shall tell it in the drawing-room after tea. What do you say ?”

“Oh, I should like it of all things,” exclaimed Dora, eagerly. “I have read hundreds of stories, but I never heard a story of adventure told by the hero himself, and I am sure Mr. Kalougia’s life has been a very eventful one.”

“And I should like to know,” added Dora’s aunt, “why Mr. Kalougia has been deprived of his home and driven from his country, if he will be so kind as to tell us.”

“I will tell you, dear Mrs. Ryvington, I cannot say with pleasure, for my story is rather a sad one, but very willingly. As I said to your son, you have granted me your hospitality, and it is my duty to give you some account of my antecedents. I am glad also to have an opportunity of explaining to you that Russian revolutionists are not necessarily bad men. Perhaps even, when I have told my story, you may agree with me in thinking, that every good man in Russia must be a revolutionist in spirit if not in deed.”

And then they returned to the drawing-room, and at Dora’s suggestion drew near the fire, for the days were growing short and the nights chilly.

Mrs. Ryvington, who was beginning to take quite a motherly interest in Kalougia as a man without country and home, made him take the place of honour, a wonderful easy arm-chair, which had been the favourite seat of her late husband.

“Shall we have the gas lit, mother ?” asked Bob.

“Oh, no, please don’t, aunt,” pleaded Dora; “the gloaming and the firelight are so much pleasanter for talking and storytelling than the flare of gas.”

“Now, Mr. Kalougia,” said Randle, after his mother had signified her approval of Dora’s suggestion, “I think we are all ready to hear your story.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

KALOUGIA’S STORY.

“My father,” began Kalougia, after a short pause, “was a landed proprietor—as you would say here, a country gentleman—near Novgorod, in the west of Russia. He had served in the army, and attained the rank of general. His ideas were old-fashioned, and, as became a military man, he was a strict disciplinarian. I think he regarded the Tsar as only a little lower than the angels, and considered loyalty to him, and obedience to his

commands, as the first of religious duties. The obedience he rendered to his Sovereign he exacted from all about him—from his wife just as much as from his children. We were three, two brothers and a sister. Peter was a few years older than myself, Zeneide a few years younger. So far as money and education went we were liberally treated; for my father, unless crossed, was not unkind. We had servants and horses always at our disposal, and so many tutors and governesses that we learnt the principal European tongues almost unconsciously; and as my mother was half English, and knew well the language, it became like a second mother tongue to us. I think I spoke it better when I was a boy than I do now. But it would profit nothing to dwell at length upon this part of my life. My boyhood was far from being unhappy, and I was sixteen or seventeen years old before it occurred to me that this was not the best of possible worlds, and Russia the happiest and best governed country in it. My eyes were first opened by reading Buckle's 'History of Civilisation'; then Lecky's 'History of Rationalism' fell into my hands, and I became acquainted with Herbert Spencer's books. I read many other works on philosophy, science, and political economy. I learnt how low was my country in the scale of civilisation, and I dreamt of a new and emancipated Russia under the sceptre of a Tsar who should be rather a beneficent chief magistrate with extraordinary powers than an hereditary despot.

"My father wanted both his sons to enter the army. Peter readily consented; his bent was for a military life, and I, though the idea of becoming a soldier was abhorrent to me, stipulated only that I might first spend a few years at St. Petersburg, and study at the University. As yet the idea of having any other will than my father's had not so much as occurred to me.

"So to St. Petersburg, full of enthusiasm and hope, eager for knowledge, and well supplied with money, I went. At the University I met with spirits as ardent as myself, and of opinions much more advanced, both in religion and politics. There was liberalism in the air. The enthusiasm excited by the emancipation of the serfs had not yet subsided. We enjoyed comparative freedom, and you will not be surprised when I tell you that before the end of my second term I belonged to the most advanced set in the University. Of course, my father knew nothing of this; for I was careful, when I went home, to keep my new political principles to myself. I should tell you, however, that from an English point of view there was nothing alarming in them. They went no farther than representative institutions, constitutional government, individual liberty, and

freedom of speech and the press. As for the Tsar, I still looked upon him as the chief hope of my country, and I would have died in his defence.

"Ah, if we might have had a little real freedom, only a beginning—if Alexander could have granted us a first instalment of constitutional government, Russia to-day would have been a happy land, and he the most beloved of earthly monarchs. But it was not to be.

"It was in the middle of my sixth term, I think, that I received a peremptory order from my father to leave the University and enter the army. I temporised, begged permission to complete my course and take my degree. He refused. Then I asked him to let me, if I must enter the army, enter it as a surgeon. This made him furious; he considered it a degradation for a Kalougia to be anything save a soldier, a courtier, or a diplomatist; and he ordered me a second time to quit the University. I said no more, but simply remained at the University and continued my studies. Then he stopped my allowance, forbade me to return home, and my mother, sister, and brother to hold any communication with me. But I have inherited some of my father's obstinacy of character. I was resolved to finish my course, come what might, and I was equally determined not to go into the army.

"Happily, I was not in debt, and by going into the cheapest possible lodgings, selling and pawning everything I could do without—and when you try it is surprising how many things you can do without—I contrived to go on for several months. But the time came when I had exhausted every resource, when I had not even wherewithal to buy bread or pay rent.

"One evening went I went to my poor room, weary and dispirited, the door was closed against me, the proprietor had taken possession of it, and refused to admit me unless I paid the arrears I owed him. He might as well have asked me for a million roubles.

"I folded my cloak around me and turned into the street. It was snowing and bitterly cold, and I had eaten nothing since daybreak. I walked about for several hours until, utterly worn out and unable to stand, I sank down on a doorstep.

"I had lain there I know not how long, semi-conscious, and too weak even to think consecutively, when I felt a hand placed on my shoulder and heard a voice.

"'Hallo, my friend,' it said, 'this is a cold couch for a winter night. Where is your home?'

"'I have none.'

"'No home! That is bad. Come with me; you shall share mine.'

"He helped me to rise, he lent me the support of his arm, he took me, as he said, to his home. It was rather a rough place, and he shared it with several others. But they gave me a kindly welcome, supper, and a bed, and seeing the condition I was in, they asked me no questions. In the morning I told my new-found friend who I was, and what had befallen me. He commended my spirit for refusing obedience to my father's unreasonable commands, advised me to go on with my studies, and invited me to take up my quarters and throw in my lot with himself and his companions. They lived in common, he told me. Every man put his earnings or income into a general fund, and so long as one had anything there was something for all. I needed not, he assured me, feel under any obligation to them, for, sooner or later, I should earn something, perhaps when the others were earning less. Karasakoff—that was my good Samaritan's name—was an artisan, a watch-maker, he told me; two or three of his companions were artisans also, and two students at the University. Altogether, at that time, there were six, I think. I made the seventh, for I thankfully accepted Karasakoff's offer. It was the only alternative to starvation or surrender. And the offer was not so strange as it may appear to you. Russian refugees at Geneva, London, and elsewhere, live together in exactly the same way. There is less of individualism among us than among Englishmen and Frenchmen, less of self-seeking. Communism seems more natural to us, perhaps because the industrial spirit is so weak in Russian society, and individualism is kept down by the pressure of an all-pervading despotism.

"It did not take me long to find out that Karasakoff was other than he seemed, something more than an ordinary artisan. He was, indeed, highly educated and very clever; and, as I learned later, a leading member of a revolutionary society which had its ramifications all over Russia. His ideas were more advanced than mine, but in the end I also joined the society."

"Was it a secret society?" asked Randle.

"Everything in Russia is secret," answered Kalougia, "and as our objects were deemed revolutionary we had to guard the utmost secrecy possible."

"You had to practise a sort of Freemasonry, then?" suggested Bob, who, having recently become a Master Mason, thought he had a special knowledge of the subject.

"Freemasonry!" exclaimed Kalougia, with a slight laugh. "Freemasonry is only playing at baby house."

"Playing at baby house, indeed!" returned Bob, in high dudgeon. "Why, Freemasonry is one of the finest and most

beneficent organisations in existence. Its principles are the principles of eternal justice, its——”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Robert,” interposed Kalougia. ‘I was not aware that you were a Freemason. I only meant that Freemasons, in this country, at least, were in no danger, and that their proceedings are secret only because they choose to make them so. Russian political societies must be secret, and all who join them do so at the risk of their liberty, if not of their lives.”

“But you have initiatory rites, passwords, occult signs of recognition, and that sort of thing, I suppose?” inquired Randle.

“None of them.”

“How do you recognise each other, then?”

“By knowledge; and we admit to our intimacy and our meetings no member from a distance, being a stranger, who is not furnished with proper credentials. If we trusted to signs and grips, such as Freemasons use, we should be lost. Spies would learn them. As for neophytes, those only are admitted who have been well watched, their characters carefully studied, and their antecedents ascertained. If a man seems lacking in courage or enthusiasm, however sincere he may be, we refuse him. A weak friend is more dangerous than a powerful enemy. The only initiatory right we have is an invitation to a meeting, and freedom to be present at all future meetings. We have neither chiefs nor oaths of obedience. There are groups, of course, and though the groups are all in communication with each other, yet each acts independently. Neither the Executive Committee, which is merely the principal group in St. Petersburg, nor any of the smaller groups ever resolve on any important action unless they are practically unanimous. We have, consequently, no dissatisfied minorities. Nor is any member of the society ever bidden, or chosen by lot, to undertake a dangerous duty; for we think that if a man is compelled to attempt something *contre cœur*—against the grain—he is very likely either to betray us or himself. When need arises we call for volunteers, and volunteers are never wanting. The difficulty is to restrain them, and it sometimes happens that men make desperate ventures on their own account without the concurrence, or even the knowledge, of the society. Solovieff was a Terrorist, but the society was in no way responsible for his attempt to shoot the Tsar. The principal work of the society to which I belonged is the propagation of revolutionary opinions by means of clandestine publications and volunteer emissaries, most of whom have the courage of heroes and the devotion of martyrs. Their efforts are chiefly directed to rousing and instructing the

working classes; for all the educated classes, except such as are directly or indirectly in government pay, and even many of them, are revolutionists in spirit if not in deed. Karasakoff was one of those apostles of revolution. A visionary, perhaps—some people might call him a fanatic—but a right noble soul, as fearless as a lion, and the truest, best friend man ever had. Ah, me! poor Karasakoff!”

“Why poor Karasakoff?” asked Dora. “What happened to him?”

“He was hanged,” said Kalougia, with an abruptness that startled everybody, and almost made Mrs. Ryvington scream. “I will tell you about him afterwards, and show you his photograph,” he continued, after a momentary pause, in his usual quiet manner. “But let me first conclude my own story. Through Karasakoff’s influence I got literary work, which enabled me to contribute something towards our common expenses; and as my brother, notwithstanding my father’s injunctions, gave me also some little help, I was enabled to finish my course at the University, and take my M.D. degree.”

“You are a physician, then?”

Kalougia gave a nod of acquiescence.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE STORY CONTINUED.

“By this time,” Kalougia went on, “I had become a very active member of the society. I was one of the editors of a clandestine paper, which made some noise both in Russia and out of it. The police were not able to lay hands on our press, but we received information (having always friends in the enemy’s camp) that some of us were suspected and in danger of arrest, I among the rest. We held a meeting to consider the matter, and it was deemed expedient that certain of our number should disappear for a season.

“Some went in one direction, some in another. As for my self, disguised as a common workman, and provided with an *alias* and false papers, I set out for Moscow. I am a very fair amateur carpenter, and through the influence of a political friend I obtained employment in a cotton factory near Moscow. After a few months’ sojourn there, I travelled to another part of the country, and got work in a similar way as assistant master in a village school. Then I acted for a while as assistant

to a surgeon. I did not stay long in a place, for I wanted to see as much of the country as possible, and learn the condition of the people by living amongst them. I carried on at the same time an active propaganda, distributed our publications wherever I could safely do so, and promoted the formation of new revolutionary groups whenever opportunity offered.

"While engaged in this work I read in a newspaper the announcement of my father's death. He had died suddenly of apoplexy. This was a great shock to me, as, in spite of the sternness of his character, and the distance at which he kept us, I had always loved my father. He was a true Russian gentleman, and a fine soldier of the ancient type. As you may suppose, I hastened home at once. I was quite prepared to find myself a disinherited son, but whatever his intentions might have been, he had died without making a will, and I received my full share of the family property.

"For more than a year I stayed at home with my mother and Zeneide, dividing my time between my duties as country gentleman and scientific and literary studies. My services as physician I gave gratis to my poorer neighbours, and I strove earnestly to improve the condition of our peasants.

"It was a happy time—the happiest I had ever known, the happiest I ever shall know. Yet I had frequent misgivings. I feared that my long absence from St. Petersburg might look like desertion of my post, and that I ought to be combating in the cause of reform by the side of my comrades. But always when I spoke of going to St. Petersburg my mother and sister, who knew the dangers that threatened me there, begged me with tears to remain, and I always ended by yielding to their entreaties.

"But one day I heard that Karasakoff and several other of our friends had been arrested, and I was asked to attend a meeting of the Executive Committee, as the principal group of the capital calls itself, to decide what should be done; for the little indulgence once granted to liberal opinions had long since been withdrawn. The people were delivered over to the tender mercies of the military and the police, and the reign of terror, which still continues, had begun.

"The call was one I felt it my duty to obey, come what might. I told my mother that I must go to St. Petersburg, and seeing that I was not to be moved from my purpose, she said that I should not go alone, that she and Zeneide would bear me company. I had no objection to offer, and the next day we set out on our journey.

"My first duty on arriving at St. Petersburg was to see my brother, who was in garrison; the next to communicate with my

political friends, and find out the time and place of the next meeting of the group.

"I heard then for the first time how poor Karasakoff had fallen into the hands of the enemy. The police had discovered the whereabouts of one of our printing-offices; they broke into it, and, of course, arrested all whom they found there, Karasakoff among the rest, though not without a struggle, in which wounds were given and received on both sides.

"I went to the meeting. We had a long discussion as to the action it was most expedient in the circumstances to take. The younger and more hot-headed members were all for adopting immediate reprisals, meeting terror with terror, and striking at some of the principal personalities of the Government and the Third Section. Some wanted to attempt the rescue of Karasakoff, and at least a dozen offered themselves for a service which would have involved the certain sacrifice of their lives. But a strong minority were in favour of moderate counsels and a waiting policy; and it was decided to consider the question further at another meeting to be held in a few days.

"When I returned to my hotel I noticed several gendarmes loitering about the door, and as I sat at supper the same night with my mother, my sister, and my brother, a whole posse of them entered our rooms, searched all our baggage, seized every paper and letter they could find, and led me off to prison.

"I remained in prison nearly two years. I was often examined, but I saw from the first, though the police suspected much and pretended to know a great deal more, they really knew very little. They did not know enough even to frame an indictment, or make a specific charge against me, and I was never tried.

"When I had been in prison a month I heard that Karasakoff and the companions found with him in the printing-office had been condemned to death, and they were shortly afterwards executed. The punishment for being connected with an unauthorised press is only penal servitude or exile; but because they had resisted the police they were hanged. I heard, too, that my friends outside had not forgotten me, and that if I could suggest any plan of escape they were quite ready to lend me their aid."

"But how did you hear all this? It must have been a very easy sort of prison, I think," asked Randle.

"Easy! You would not think so if you were shut up in it for a few months," answered Kalougia, with a bitter laugh. "My correspondence was, of course, conducted by stealth, yet with less difficulty than you might suppose. Sympathy defies even bolts and bars; and there is always sympathy for political prisoners. The victims of tyranny obtain, openly or secretly, indulgences

that other inmates of gaols are unable to command. It is so in Russia; it used to be so in Italy; and if you should ever have prisoners of State who represent a cause, it will be so in England.

"Though I was permitted to have books, writing materials were denied to me. But I procured ink and made myself pens; and when you have books you have paper. Letters have come to me in a loaf, in a marrow bone, in the fold of a collar, in pieces of soap, and when I was sick in a powder. I have received and conveyed letters in the shake of the hand—in a kiss, even."

"In a kiss!" exclaimed the two ladies, simultaneously.

"Yes; I will tell you how. On certain days my friends were allowed to see me, always, of course, in the presence of a turnkey, who was supposed never to take his eyes off us. Now, if you write very small, you can say a great deal on a very tiny bit of paper; and by dint of practice and patience I succeeded in writing a hand of microscopic minuteness. When I had written what I used to call a kiss, I would fold it inside a piece of leather, cut from the lining of a book, and roll it into a ball. Then, when Peter and Zeneide came to see me—they generally came together—I would place it furtively in my mouth, and as we kissed each other—it is the custom in Russia for men to kiss, you know—push it with my tongue into Peter's mouth.

"Once, I remember, a missive of this sort slipped from my lips and fell on the floor. It was a terrible moment, for if the turnkey had seen it, or found it afterwards, my brother and some others would have been frightfully compromised. In order to distract the man's attention I turned to my sister, put my arms round her, laughed, talked loudly, and made as much noise and fuss as I could; and while the turnkey stared at us, Peter contrived to pick up and conceal the letter. But such stratagems are no longer possible. A new rule has come into force that, when prisoners have interviews with their friends, they must be separated from each other by a grating, through which nothing can be passed.

"Then there came a time when poor Zeneide had to visit me alone, and, worse still, when—when——"

Here Kalougia bowed his head and covered his face with his hands, and Dora thought she heard a stifled sob.

"Don't go on, if it pains you, Kalougia," said Randle. "I had no idea your story would be so sad."

"You are very kind," said Kalougia, more calmly. "But if you will permit me I would like to continue. It is the memory, not the utterance, that gives the pain, and the memory of my sorrows is always with me. I was going to tell you what befell

my brother. While I was in prison he happened, when writing to an old friend of the family who was studying at Paris, to mention my imprisonment, and very imprudently he expressed the indignation he felt at my treatment—that I should be kept so long in confinement, a confinement that was injuring my health, untried, and without any specific charge being laid against me. The letter was opened, handed to the police, and for having written it Peter Kalougia was arrested in the middle of the night. The next day he was sent off to Siberia, without trial, and without being allowed to see his mother or his sister, or say farewell to his friends.”

“Oh, how terrible!” exclaimed Dora; “and is he—is he there now?”

“He went to Siberia four years ago. If alive, he is there still.”

“Alive! Don’t you know whether he is alive or not?”

“Though untried, he is treated as a convict. I am an exile, and we are not allowed to correspond,” said Kalougia, sorrowfully.

“My brother, I should tell you, had committed no political offence whatever. He may have sympathised with us—there are very few educated Russians who in their hearts do not—but he held himself strictly aloof from our proceedings, and minded only his military duties. His sole offence was too much love for me. His fate preyed terribly on my mind, and, together with the dampness of my cell and bad and insufficient food, so affected my health that I had to be removed to the hospital, where I remained under treatment for several months. When sufficiently recovered I was reconsigned to my cell; but, my cure not being considered complete, I had to make a daily visit to the hospital for examination by the surgeon on duty. Although the prison and the hospital were within the same outer wall, the two buildings were some distance apart. In going from one to the other it was necessary to traverse a wide court and pass near the principal gate.

“This gate was often open for the admission of carts bringing forage and provisions, the place being at once prison, barracks, and fortress.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LIBERTY OR DEATH.

“EVERY time I passed that gateway I looked at it with a yearning that can be understood only by those who have been long deprived of their liberty, and who know not if they will ever be free again. I never saw the gate open—and it was often open—that I did not feel an almost irresistible impulse to take to my heels and try to gain the wide street that fronted the fortress. But I was always checked by the thought of what then? In my walks to and from the hospital I was invariably accompanied by two soldiers with fixed bayonets, loaded rifles, and in full marching order. They had strict orders to fire on any prisoner who attempted to escape. I might be shot before I reached the gateway; and even if I got outside I could not hope to get clear away. I should either be shot, or overtaken and captured by some of the gendarmes and soldiers who were always strolling in the neighbourhood of the prison. But it was just conceivable that if, after passing out of the gateway, I could jump on a horse or into a carriage, I might bid defiance to my pursuers and make good my escape.

“I communicated this idea to my political friends. They promised me their heartiest help, and we agreed upon a plan. They knew at what hour I generally crossed the courtyard, and it was arranged that on certain days (not every day, for fear of rousing suspicion) they should have a carriage waiting outside. and that the playing of a violin should be the signal that the coast was clear, and everything in readiness for my contemplated flight.

“I had still a full week before me, and I turned the interval to account by walking always as rapidly across the court as possible—partly to get myself into training for my run, partly to accustom my escort to the idea of my being several yards in advance of them. The escort did not, of course, always consist of the same men; but as I was seen at one time or another by all the soldiers of the garrison, none saw anything strange in my going on ahead, or had the least suspicion that I was preparing to give them the slip.

“Intense expectation made my senses almost preternaturally acute; and one morning as I quitted the hospital I felt, rather than heard, that the signal was being given. When anticipation became certainty, and I knew that the moment on which depended my liberty, and perhaps my life, was at hand, my heart beat so violently that I thought I should have fallen to the

ground, and a mist that obscured everything filled my eyes. A minute afterwards I was as cool as I am now, and, drawing a deep breath I went, as usual, ahead of my escort, but rather more rapidly than usual.

"When I came in sight of the gate I saw that it stood wide open. It had been opened to admit a cart laden with hay.

"If I could only put that cart between myself and the soldiers!

"First casting a glance over my shoulder to see how near they were, I increased my walk to a trot. One of the men called out to me to moderate my pace. On this I turned my face towards the gate, and, muttering to myself 'liberty or death,' I ran with all my speed.

"Fortune favoured me. The soldiers, either for lack of presence of mind or from reluctance to shoot down an unarmed man, held their fire, and with their bayonets at the charge, gave chase.

"Long confinement and illness had made me weak, and had I had far to go my pursuers might have overtaken me. But I ran round one side of the hay-cart, while they, hoping to intercept me, ran round the other. This manœuvre gained me a few yards, and before they could come up I had passed out of the gateway and jumped into the carriage which was waiting hard by. Quick as thought a military cloak was thrown over my shoulders, a shako put upon my head, and the next moment I was on my way, as fast as two fleet horses could take me, towards a place of safety."

"You got clear away, then," exclaimed Dora, eagerly; "they did not follow you?"

"I got clear away, and I might have kept away, but—however, I am anticipating. A hiding-place had been prepared for me in advance. In a great city it is always easy to lose yourself. It was arranged that I should remain in close concealment until the heat of the pursuit had slackened; and that then, provided with passports, which, notwithstanding the precautions taken by the police, it is never difficult either to procure or fabricate, I should make for the Norwegian frontier and travel that way to England.

"Everything had been prepared for my journey, and I was just on the point of leaving St. Petersburg, when I heard that Zeneide had been arrested on suspicion of being privy to my escape; although she did not so much as know that I had a thought of escaping, and was first told of my flight by the police themselves.

"I could not go away and leave my sister in prison. Whatever might become of me, my poor mother must not be bereft of

her one remaining child, the stay of her old age. I told my friends, the members of the group by whose help I had escaped, that I should offer to give myself up on condition of Zeneide's immediate release. They tried to dissuade me, saying that the police were not to be trusted, and that even if I should give myself up it was by no means certain that they would let my sister go. But I would not believe them. Unscrupulous as I knew the Third Section to be, I could not believe they would violate a solemn promise deliberately made.

"So I wrote to the Chief of Police that my sister had neither helped me to escape nor conveyed one message either from me or from my political friends; and I offered, if he would release her, to give myself up. In order to leave no loophole for equivocation, I was very explicit, and I asked for an equally explicit answer. The answer was to appear on a certain day in a newspaper which I named; and in order to prevent the police from surmising my whereabouts my letter was posted at a town some distance from St. Petersburg.

"The answer appeared in due course, and was, as I expected it would be, in the affirmative. It was also explicit, and on the following evening I went by a roundabout way (so as to avoid implicating the friends who had sheltered me) to the office of the Chief of Police and gave myself up. He said that Zeneide Kalougia should be set at liberty the next morning, and ordered me to be taken back to my old quarters. To prevent my escaping a second time, I was loaded with chains, and a soldier stood sentinel at my door, night and day.

"Then I was examined, re-examined, and questioned day after day. They tried to find out, first by cajolery, then by threats, then by other means, who had helped me to escape, which of the prison officials had conveyed my correspondence, and where I had lodged while I was at large. They offered, if I would tell, to procure me a free pardon, to set me at liberty, to let me go whither I would. If I refused, they said, I should be kept a prisoner in chains all my life long.

"I always gave the same answer. I said that, whatever might be my fate, I would never betray those who had helped me in my need.

"And then something happened which I must not tell, which I have sworn never to reveal. Oh, but I suffered cruelly in that prison. I was very ill, and I think I must have been at the door of death; for when I knew myself, when my memory came back to me, I was once more in the hospital. The people there treated me very kindly. I read pity in their eyes. Little by little I regained my strength. But I felt that I would rather die than live—death would be rest; imprisonment in chains life-long

torture. Yet in spite of my wishes I grew better. Soon I began to walk a little. Another month, I said to myself, and they will take me back to my dungeon and my chains—for life—for life—always those words seemed to be ringing in my ears.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SET FREE.

“As I have already mentioned,” continued Kalongia, “the people in the hospital were very good. The physicians showed me every possible favour. I was a *confrère*; they knew how much I had suffered, they knew the fate that awaited me, and they kept me on the sick list as long as they dared. But the time came when they could keep me no longer; and I was on the point of being taken back to my cell and my chains when I received a visit from one of the chiefs of the Third Section. He had come, he said, to make me a proposal. On certain conditions the Government were prepared to set me free.

“You will perhaps think that the black cloud of despair was at once lifted from my soul; that I accepted the offer as eagerly as a drowning man grasps the hand that saves him from death. But similar offers had been made to me before, and until I knew the conditions I was less grateful than suspicious.

“The conditions were these: I was to swear not to reveal what had befallen me in the dungeon; travel under escort to the frontier without seeing any of my friends; remain abroad until permitted to return; give my word of honour while abroad neither to take any part in politics, whether by word or deed, nor to correspond with the members of any Russian secret society.

“Not very hard conditions, you will perhaps say, yet they involved renunciation of the dream and passion of my life—the regeneration of my country by the destruction of the despotic system which enslaves and corrupts her. But what could I do? If I remained in prison I should be equally impotent, while out of it I might perhaps be able to do something for humanity, if not for Russia. A pledge to abstain from political action would not debar me from influencing the action of others. And I was not the only one. There would be others left to carry on the work when I was gone. I balanced one evil against the other, and chose the least.

“I pleaded hard for an interview with my mother and sister; to be allowed to say farewell to two or three friends of my family.

But on this point, as on all others, the authorities were inexorable. The agent's instructions left him no chance, he said. My answer must be 'yes' or 'no.'

"I said 'Yes.'

"The very next day I started for the frontier, accompanied by two agents of police, and, until we set foot on German land one or other of them never lost sight of me for a moment. But they were by no means bad fellows. They did all in their power to make themselves agreeable and the journey pleasant. At the moment of parting, the border being passed, and their mission fulfilled, one of the men, unseen by his companion, handed me a letter. 'I was asked to give you that,' he said, and then I knew, what I had already suspected, that he was a member of the society."

"How could you tell?" interposed Bob. "I thought you had neither passwords nor tokens of recognition."

"I knew from the letter. It would have been entrusted to none other than a member."

"When the agents of police were gone," resumed Kalougia, "I opened the letter. It was from one of my political friends, and it told me (here his voice became almost inaudible)—it told me that I had no longer a sister—that Zeneide was dead. They had killed her."

"Killed your sister! Oh, don't say so; it is too horrible," exclaimed Dora, piteously. "Was she—you do not mean that she

"No, she was not executed. I will tell you how they killed her. It fell out as my friends had foreboded. Although I had given myself up that my poor Zeneide might be free, and the police had given their word, they would not let her go. Yet they had nothing against her, as the chief himself admitted to one of our relations who went to him to ask why she was not liberated, as he had said. He acknowledged both her innocence and his promise; but he said that, as the Tsar had been informed when she was arrested that Zeneide Kalougia had connived at her brother's escape, she must remain in prison. To release her would be tantamount to saying that the police had been mistaken, and might lose them his majesty's favour. In a few months, possibly, when the affair had blown over a while, they might let her go; but, for the present, she must remain where she was. My sister had a high spirit in a frail body, and she bore her sufferings bravely; but deprivation of fresh air and sunlight undermined her health. She faded like a delicate flower struck by the breath of winter, and, a month before I entered the hospital, Zeneide had left it for the grave."

"And your mother was left all alone in her sore trouble,"

said Mrs. Ryvington, whose mother's heart Kalougia's narration had deeply touched. "Poor woman! poor woman! The Lord pity her!"

"You are very good, Mrs. Ryvington," answered Kalougia, in a tone of deepest grief. "But my mother is dead too. She died three months after the death of Zeneide."

"Then the Lord had pity on her, and took her to Himself," said the old lady, solemnly; "and may He who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb send His Spirit to comfort you!"

To this Kalougia made no reply, and there followed a silence of some minutes' duration, broken only by the crackling of the blaze on the hearth and the ticking of the mantelpiece clock. The Russian was almost hidden in his huge armchair, and the deepening twilight darkened every object in the room; but when a leaping flame lit up Dora's face, he could see that she was deeply moved, and her cheeks were wet with new-fallen tears. Robert, who did not much like the gloaming, and to whom long silence was intolerable, was the first to speak.

"Wasn't it rather strange they let you go," he said, addressing Kalougia, "after saying they would keep you a prisoner in chains all your life?"

"Ah," answered Kalougia, in a voice trembling with emotion, "I did not tell you. I owed my release to my sister's death. I gave myself up, hoping that she might thereby gain her liberty; and her death set me free. When she died, the Tsar heard of it—they could not keep that from him. He caused inquiry to be made, and when it came out that Zeneide was innocent of all offence he was very angry; the Chief of Police got a severe reprimand; and, as some amends, I suppose, for the wrong that had been done to us, my imprisonment was commuted into banishment.

"Then the Tsar is not such a bad fellow, after all?" said Randle.

"Ah, no," said Kalougia; "I loved him once, and I feel sometimes as if I loved him still. He is only weak, and lately I think he has lost his nerve. Instead of advancing boldly, however slowly, on the path of reform, and giving Russia a little more liberty, he has withdrawn all that in his better days he granted. His advisers, who are interested in the maintenance of the existing system for the same reason that Turkish pashas are interested in the maintenance of the existing system in Turkey, because it gives them power and opportunity for plunder, persuade him that, unless every liberal aspiration be ruthlessly repressed, neither himself nor his dynasty will be safe. And they go further than he either wishes or knows. It is a terrible position, and though I have conspired against his

government, and would, if I could, overturn it to-morrow, there is no man in the world I so much pity as our Tsar."

"You said you would show us a portrait of your sister," interposed Dora, who did not seem very much interested in the character and shortcomings of Alexander II. "I should so much like to see it. Was she like you?"

"You shall judge. I will go and fetch it; it is in my room."

Mrs. Ryvington rang the bell and ordered the lamps to be lit.

When Kalougia returned, he drew from his pocket a coloured photograph, enclosed in a velvet-covered case. He handed it first to Dora.

It was the likeness of a young girl about Dora's own age, with large dark eyes, heavy masses of black hair, rolled backward from her brow, a pale skin, and refined and intellectual features. The resemblance to Kalougia was unmistakable.

After a long look at the portrait of this Russian girl, as young and as innocent as herself, who had died in a dungeon to save a minister's credit, Dora passed it on to the others. She was too much moved to trust herself to speak.

"It seems a great pity," sighed Mrs. Ryvington, as she handed the photograph to her sons, "and she so young, too. If that is what revolutionising leads to, I hope that nobody that belongs to me will revolutionise. It must cause a great deal of trouble in families."

As Kalougia replaced the crimson case in his pocket, there accidentally fell from it a card, containing, as it seemed, a number of cartes-de-visite.

"Have you a photograph of your brother in your collection?" asked Dora, who had by this time recovered her equanimity.

"Unhappily I have not, Miss Ryvington. This card contains the likenesses of some of our heroes and martyrs; but my brother's is not amongst them."

"Heroes and martyrs! Oh, I should so like to see them. May I, please?"

"Of course you may, Miss Ryvington; but don't you think" (glancing at Mrs. Ryvington) "that it is rather late? Another time would perhaps be better."

"Yes," said Bob, with a scarcely suppressed yawn. "It would perhaps be as well. Mother has had a long journey. She seems sleepy."

In point of fact, Mrs. Ryvington was nodding desperately, and could hardly keep her eyes open; and though she thought it her duty to protest that she had never felt more wide awake in all her life, and was quite eager to hear all about Mr. Kalougia's

heroes and martyrs, she accepted her son's suggestion, and allowed her niece to lead her to her room.

"Oh, Mr. Kalougia," said Dora, with her sweetest smile, as she bade him good night, "I am so sorry for you."

The Russian replied with a look more expressive than speech. He had never heard words so tender, so tenderly spoken, since his last interview with his sister Zeneide.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN INVITATION.

WHEN Dora went down to the breakfast-room next morning she found it untenanted. Her aunt, who, despite her years, was generally an early riser, not feeling very well, had asked her "to see to the breakfast," her cousins were at the factory, and Kalougia had not appeared. So she sat down and waited. She sat with her head poised on her hand and gazed through the window, over the tops of the long chimneys, towards the brown moors and green meadows, dotted here and there with grey farm-houses and belts of dark woodland, which stretched beyond. But she looked without seeing; her mind was busied with the strange story she had heard the night before. She pitied Kalougia, yet she pitied still more Kalougia's sister. He at least was free, but Zeneide had died in a dreary dungeon. It almost seemed to her, since she had seen the photograph, that she had known Zeneide. There was a tender wistfulness in the poor girl's eyes, an expression of sadness about the mouth, which seemed to foreshadow her fate, to mark her out as destined for an early death. And then Dora tried to think what life in a prison could be like. She knew what it was to be kept in the house by bad weather; to see the clouds hang low on the hills, and the air thick with moisture; to hear the swish of water against the windows, and watch the melancholy rain-drops as they drip from leaf to leaf, and sink ghost-like into the sodden ground. This was bad enough, and even with the aid of books, work, and music, the society of friends, and the prospect of finer weather on the morrow, is hard to bear. What, then, must it be to be shut up in a dungeon, even when the sun shines, even when the birds sing; to be denied all sight of the sun, save perhaps an occasional gleam through a grated window at an unreachable height; to be denied even the sorry satisfaction of seeing it rain; never to hear music, or behold flowers and green fields; never to go out; never to see anybody but turnkeys, and prison women as unfortunate as herself? No

wonder Zeneide died ; Dora would have died too—she was sure she would—and have thought it a happy release. Yet Kalougia had been two years in solitary confinement. How had he borne it, she wondered ? How nobly he acted in giving himself up, when they arrested his sister ! How he must have suffered when he heard of her death, and that his self-sacrifice had been in vain ! No wonder he looked sad sometimes. What could have happened to him in prison, that he had promised not to reveal ? What—

“ Good morning, Miss Ryvington,” said the object of her thoughts, who at this moment entered the room. “ I hope I have not kept you waiting. I did not know what time it was. My watch is not quite right, I think.”

Dora explained that her aunt would not be visible for a while, and that she was waiting the return of Randle and Robert from the factory. She thought that Mr. Kalougia might perhaps have gone with them.

“ No, he had been walking round the garden and going through the conservatory with the gardener, who had shown him some rare orchids from South America, which had just arrived ; ” and then, after a short pause, he said, “ I have to thank you, Miss Ryvington, for the kind sympathy you expressed for me last night. At the moment my emotion was too great to permit me to speak, but now I thank you with all my heart.”

“ You were thinking of your poor sister ? ”

“ Yes, I was thinking of Zeneide, *la pauvre malheureuse*, and my emotion was all the greater that it seemed to me you were not unlike her—in character I mean, for your face is much more beautiful.”

“ What can you know about my character ? ” said Dora, with a blush. “ Why, you never saw me before yesterday.”

“ Oh, but it is easy to see, Miss Ryvington, that yours is a noble nature, and that, like Zeneide, you are tender and true — ”

“ I beg pardon for interrupting you, Mr. Kalougia,” said Dora, to whom the reference to herself, however flattering, was somewhat embarrassing ; “ but I wanted to ask you—if you could let me have—if you could spare me a photograph of your sister for my album. I should be so much obliged.”

“ Certainly, with the greatest of pleasure. I shall esteem it an honour that you place Zeneide’s likeness in your album. I will fetch it now.” And before Dora could protest that there was no need for hurry, that it would do any time, he had left the room. In a few minutes he returned with the photograph in his hand.

“ It is very like the one you showed us last night,” observed Dora.

“ Yes, it is very like,” returned Kalougia, gravely ; but he

did not tell her that it was the same, and that it was the only one he had.

"You have not one of your brother, I think you said?"

"Unfortunately I have not."

"Nor of yourself?" asked Dora.

"Nor of myself. But, if it would please you to honour my poor likeness with a place in your album, nothing would be easier than to procure one."

"Oh, no, Mr. Kalougia, I did not mean that at all," answered Dora, colouring a second time. "It is only because I like to arrange my cartes de visite in family groups; and I thought it would be nice to put your brother's photograph on one side of your sister's, and yours on the other. Have you the other photographs you showed us last night, or rather, which you promised to show us?"

"The Heroes and Martyrs, you mean?"

"Yes, that is what you called them, I think. I like looking at photographs; it is almost as if you saw the people themselves. And if it would not give you too much trouble——"

"It is no trouble at all; it is here in my pocket."

As he spoke he produced a card, some six inches by four wide, and handed it to Dora. It was surrounded by a black border, and contained nine photographs of small carte-de-visite size. Eight were portraits of men; the ninth was the likeness of a young girl. Each of them was in the form of a medallion; four of the medallions were edged with rope, five with chains. At the right hand upper corner of the card was a gallows, erect in a heap of skulls and fetters. In the opposite corner the gallows appeared lying on the ground, and the fetters were broken and the skulls had vanished. Between the two uppermost medallions gleamed the fearful face and terrible eyes of a Medusa. In each of the lower corners were an axe and a block. In the centre of the card appeared this inscription:—

RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONIST
HEROES AND MARTYRS.

"How dreadful! What does it all mean?" asked Dora, with a shudder. "Who are they?"

"Victims of the Russian Government and heroes and martyrs of the Russian people," answered Kalougia, in a hushed voice, as if he were a religious enthusiast speaking of some sacred mystery. "The portraits surrounded by ropes are those of martyrs who died on the gibbet; the others those of heroes who have perished in prison, or are still expiating in dungeons and chains their love of liberty and country. I knew some of them personally. I know

their stories—all are deeply pathetic, some tragic. If you would like to learn who they were and why they suffered, I am always at your disposal."

"Not now, thank you, Mr. Kalougia," said Dora, turning pale, for she felt as she remembered once to have felt when she glanced for a moment into Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. "I expect my cousins every moment. But I shall be glad if you will some time tell me about this girl. She has an interesting face. But surely" (in alarm) "they did not hang this girl?"

"No, her name was Marie Saboutina, and she died in prison. Yes, I will gladly tell you her story, Miss Ryvington. It will show you what our Russian girls are capable of."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Robert, who announced that something had gone wrong with one of the engines, and that as Randle was staying to see it put to rights, he wanted his breakfast to be sent down to the counting-house. After breakfast he would be in the laboratory, where he should be glad to meet Mr. Kalougia, who might, perhaps, if he were not otherwise engaged, like to walk down with Robert when he returned to the factory.

To this proposal the Russian gladly assented, and after breakfast he and Robert went off together.

"Am I right in supposing," said Kalougia, in answer to a remark of Bob's about Dora, "that your cousin lives with you—that this is her home?"

"No. What gave you that impression? Her home is at Deepdene Park, a few miles from here, on the other side of the town."

"I thought so because your brother said that she and your mother were coming home."

"Well, Dora often calls this her second home. She was born here, and she always says that she likes Redscar better than Deepdene."

"She is *fiancée*, of course?"

"*Fiancée*? Ah, I understand. Engaged, you mean? No, she is not engaged. Mr. Right has not come yet."

"Mr. Right! That is a *prétendant*, I suppose—a suitor, do you not call it in English?"

"Oh, no," laughed Bob. "Mr. Right is the right man—the man she falls in love with, you know. If she fell in love with you, for instance, you would be Mr. Right. But Dora has to marry a titled swell—somebody who can make her at least a 'lady,' or she will lose her fortune."

"Indeed, how is that?" asked Kalougia, carelessly.

"I don't mean that Dora will have nothing," Bob said, after explaining the purport of his uncle's will. "She will have

something nice in any case. Her share of her mother's fortune is £10,000, and she will have a nice sum in accumulated interest to draw when she comes of age. Then she has half the income from the estate; and unless her brother finds a titled wife very quickly, that will soon swell up to a considerable sum."

"Your uncle must have been very anxious to ally his family with the aristocracy to make such a testament as that."

"Wasn't he, just! He repented of it though—too late, unfortunately. I daresay the 'Deep Un'—that's my cousin Randle—is looking out for an earl's daughter already, if the truth were known. But Dora protests that she will not have a sprig of nobility at any price; that she will marry neither for rank nor money. And I believe she will be as good as her word. She knows her own mind, Dora does."

"You think, then, that even if a titled Mr. Right were to come he would have no chance?"

"If he had a title, I don't think he would be Mr. Right at all; he would be Mr. Wrong. Dora would have nothing to do with him. She says no lord will ever want to marry her except for her money, and she declines to sell herself either for twelve thousand or any conceivable number of pounds a year."

"And she is quite right," exclaimed Kalongia, warmly. "I admire her spirit." And then more quietly he said:

"But if young ladies in some other countries—in France and Russia, for instance—were equally independent, there would be very few marriages, I am afraid. A French *bourgeois* would no more think of marrying a bride without a dowry than of lending money without interest; and I have seen often in French matrimonial papers advertisements from girls, or from their parents, offering themselves and their fortunes in exchange for a title."

"It is not so here, though. But I am not quite sure. There's old Hicks, the banker; he has married two or three of his daughters to peers or peers' sons, and, by Jove, they say he has regularly bought them. I do believe if Dora were to advertise she might have her pick out of a baker's dozen."

The conversation continued until they reached the factory, Kalongia now and again putting in a word, but Bob doing most of the talking.

"Confound it," the latter mentally exclaimed, as they parted near the laboratory, "what a fool I am! Here I have been telling a fellow I have hardly known two days all about our family affairs. It is true what my father used to say. I shall never learn to put a bridle on my tongue."

This was in allusion to a habit Bob had of being too communicative concerning the affairs of the family or the firm, and allowing himself to be "pumped." This facility of disposition

had drawn upon him several reproofs from his father and mother, and been the subject of remonstrance from Randle. But, as in the present instance, he rarely bethought him of his failing until after he had committed an indiscretion.

In the afternoon Kalougia walked into Whitebrook, as he said, to make a few purchases for the replenishment of his wardrobe. Randle offered him a horse, but he preferred to go on foot. Before setting out he wrote a letter to a friend at St. Petersburg, and at one of the shops at which he called he asked to be directed to the best photographer in the town.

When he returned to Redscar House, whither he arrived before the brothers came up from the factory, he entered the drawing-room and found there a gentleman whom at first sight he mistook for his host.

Dora introduced him as her brother, Mr. Ryvington.

"Shall I say Mr. Kalougia or Dr. Kalougia?" she asked. "You know you told us last night you were an M.D."

"Whichever you like," answered the Russian. "I am a very idle physician at present, and hardly worthy of so honourable a designation."

"I think you had better say 'Doctor,' Dora," Deep Randle said, with a smile. "When a man has a title, particularly when it has been earned by study and research, the least one can do is to address him by it. My sister has been telling me something of your history, Dr. Kalougia. I knew things were bad in Russia, but I had no idea they were in such a terrible state. It is a country I never liked, and now I shall like it less than ever. 'Pon my word, I think I would rather live in Dahomey or Timbuctoo."

"It is not the country that is in fault, it is the government," said Kalougia, gravely; and an acute observer might have detected in his manner a slight touch of irritation.

"Exactly; that is what I meant. I never thought of blaming the people. As you say, it is only the government that is to blame," replied Mr. Ryvington, reminded by Kalougia's remark that indiscriminate condemnation of Russia in the presence of a Russian was hardly in the best of taste. "By-the-bye, Dr. Kalougia, if you are staying here any time, I hope you will honour us with a visit at Deepdene. We shall be delighted to see you, I am sure."

"Thank you very much, but I doubt if I shall have time. I cannot stay more than a few days longer, I am afraid."

"Come now, Kalougia, that won't do at all. We shall not let you go yet, and to that you must make up your mind. Why, you have only just come," intervened Red Randle, who had just entered the room.

"You are really very kind; but I feel that I am taking up too much of your time, and your time is so very valuable."

"It is quite the other way about, I assure you. Your lessons in electricity are worth more to me than a great deal of time; and unless you feel that you really must go, that your engagements will not permit you to prolong your visit, I shall take it as a great favour if you will stay a little longer and help me with my experiments."

"As you put it in that way," said Kalougia, frankly, "and you are good enough to think that I can be of some little use to you, I will stay a little longer, Mr. Randle."

"In that case, Dr. Kalougia, you will pay us a visit at Deepdene and stay a few days," put in Deep Randle. "I daresay we shall be able to amuse you. If you care for sport, we can find you both hunting and shooting. We shall have our first meet in a few days, and the partridges are not all killed yet by a long way."

Kalougia seemed to hesitate, but just as he was about to speak, and possibly to refuse, he happened to cast a fleeting glance at Dora, unperceived by anyone save herself. Perhaps he read in her face a confirmation of her brother's invitation. At any rate, he answered in the affirmative, and it was settled that, before leaving the neighbourhood, he should spend a few days at Deepdene.

It was a common subject of remark at Whitebrook about this time how greatly young Mr. Ryvington had improved since his father's death. That event and his increased responsibilities were considered to have at once "softened" and "settled" him. He went about more. He tried to make himself useful. He had even presided at a Sunday-school tea-party, and made a highly appropriate speech, in which he introduced an exceedingly apt quotation from one of Dr. Watts's hymns. His name was seen in every local subscription list; his ancient haughtiness was replaced by a promiscuous affability, and out of his own house he was never seen in a bad temper. He made it a point to keep on good terms with his kinsfolk at Redscar, and he treated Mrs. Ryvington with so much deference that she thought her nephew's heart was "touched at last," and the good lady was disposed to see in the circumstance a providential leading. Even Randle and Robert were constrained to admit that their cousin was improving. They were, nevertheless, all somewhat surprised at the warmth and spontaneousness of the invitation which he had extended to Kalougia. They thought it did him credit, and Mrs. Ryvington regarded it as another proof that her nephew was undergoing some mysterious process of moral regeneration. Perhaps, if she had heard a remark he made a few days subsequently to his

friend and mentor, Mr. Thomas Cliviger, she might have been of a rather different opinion.

"I have invited that Russian doctor to the Park," he said. "He is a good-looking sort of chap, clever and that, and has a romantic history behind him. Just the sort of fellow girls take an interest in. Who knows? Perhaps Dora may fall in love with him. I wish she would, for until she is married to a commoner, and I take to wife a 'lady,' I shall never feel that Deepdene is really my own."

CHAPTER XL.

A PREDICTION FULFILLED.

"I NEVER was so much surprised in all my life as when I heard it this morning. You might have knocked me down with a feather, as the saying is. How much did you say they have gone for, Mr. Sagar?"

The speaker was John Gully, who, divested of his coat, and with his tape thrown carelessly round his neck, was holding converse with a few friends and customers who were smoking their cigars and sipping their brandies-and-water in his room at the "Rainbow," some three or four weeks after his memorable jump into the butcher's shop. The event that had so much surprised him was the failure of Tugwood Brothers, which had been announced, or rather had oozed out, a few hours previously.

"The exact amount has not been stated yet, but it's somewhere about £300,000, I'm told," answered the gentleman addressed as Mr. Sagar.

"By the Lord Harry, but that's a thumping sum. Why, a year's interest on it at five per cent. is more than I shall be able to save by a life of assiduous toil. Who's in—who are the principal creditors? I daresay you can tell us, Mr. Copskewer; you generally know all about these things."

Copskewer was a yarn agent from Manchester, with lantern jaws and a long nose, who, if he had minded his own business as closely as he minded other people's, might have been a rich man.

"Yes," he said complacently, in answer to the tailor's appeal, "I do sometimes contrive to pick up a bit of information. I heard a whisper on Saturday of what was coming. It was the bank that stopped them, or, rather, would not let them go on. Tugwoods had overdrawn their account £30,000, besides discounts and that, and Mr. Oliver asked for £10,000 more, and when they did not get it he pulled up—could not go on, in fact.

The brokers are 'in' nearly £20,000, Rammers, the Manchester agents, nearly as much, and a whole lot more for smaller amounts."

"Do you know, I am rather glad the bank has got it so hot?" observed the tailor.

"What on earth for, Gully?"

"Well, for one thing, the more a bank is in, the less others are likely to be in, and banks can stand a bad debt or two without taking much harm. A loss that would make no appreciable difference in a dividend might ruin a dozen decent tradesmen outright. Then bank directors, and managers, and sub-managers, and the rest, are often such awfully conceited chaps. They are none the worse for a bit of financial phlebotomy now and again."

"You are not a bank shareholder, that's clear," said Sagar. "Anyhow, I hope you are not in."

"I do not consider myself in, Mr. Sagar, although I have an account both with Mr. James Tugwood and Mr. Oliver—have had these many years. But, bless you, I am not in the least uneasy. Gentlemen always pay their tailor's bills, don't they, Mr. Robert?"

"I suppose they do, if they can; but suppose they cannot, what then?" asked Bob Ryvington, who, as usual on a market day, was enjoying his post-prandial smoke in the tailor's room.

"Then they are not gentlemen," said Gully, decidedly. "Anyhow, in this case I am sure to get paid. I shall rank on the private estates, you know. But you have not told us all yet, Mr. Copskewer. Is anybody in this town in—anybody besides the bank, I mean?"

"A lot of tradesmen, of course; but none for large amounts."

"Mr. Cliviger?"

"No. Tom has managed to keep out this time. I think he was like me—he had an inkling beforehand."

"Well, I suppose the next thing will be an election," observed the tailor, as he lighted another cigar. "Mr. Tugwood cannot well keep his seat after this."

"He is not going to try. He was to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds yesterday. I met the town-clerk not many minutes since. He says the writ may be here by Monday; and, as likely as not, the election will come off next week."

"Whom are you going to put in?"

"Hopps, of course. He was fixed upon long since as the next Liberal candidate, whenever there was a vacancy. It was all settled at a meeting of the Liberal Committee last night, and his address will be out to-morrow morning."

"Are not the Conservatives going to run anybody?"

"No; it will be a walk over this time. After the last election the leaders on both sides agreed that the representation should be divided. The two parties are so evenly balanced, you know; neither can get in more than one man. And very well they did, for, what with the turn-out at Ribbleton and the lock-out here, the hands are in such a state of excitement that a contested election coming on the top of it all would play the very deuce. There would be hats on the green, and no mistake. They were breaking windows in John-street last night, and things don't look very pacific to-day. There are more lads in clogs knocking about than I quite like. Yes, I am glad there will be no contest."

"You are mistaken, Sagar, my boy; there will be a contest."

The gentleman who made this observation had entered the room while Sagar was speaking. He was middle-sized, broad-shouldered, and had a bright intelligent face and keen dark eyes. In one hand he carried a walking-stick, in the other a piece of paper that looked like a placard.

"Nonsense, Slasher! Who says so?" returned Sagar.

"I say so; and it's true."

"I don't believe it."

"What do you say to this, then?" exclaimed Slasher, opening and holding up his paper, which turned out to be a big poster—great blue letters on a white ground.

"Deep Ryvington!" shouted everybody in chorus.

"That's what I call a corker," said a young loom-maker with very red hair and a very big mouth, who had just come in; "a regular corker, by Jingo!"

"It's a gross breach of faith—an infernal shame," exclaimed Sagar, who was a shining Liberal light. "An infernal shame. The Conservatives agreed to take one seat and leave us the other."

"The Conservative Committee did, perhaps," Slasher replied, quietly. "But I was no party to the agreement; neither was Mr. Ryvington, nor a few thousands more, and we mean to fight, and, by Jingo! we'll win."

"I think I'll go," said Sagar, who seemed a good deal put out.

"You had better," said Slasher, sarcastically. "You'll be wanted. Why, you Liberals have been asleep. Old Hopps's address is not out yet, and Mr. Ryvington's is being posted all over the town; and what's more, we are going to have a big meeting to-night at the theatre."

"Did you not know your cousin was coming out, Mr. Robert?" asked Slasher, turning to Bob Ryvington.

"Not I, indeed; nor any of us. Nothing less than seeing that address would have made me believe it. He must be crazy. He cannot have the ghost of a chance, you know."

"Cannot he, though! He has every chance. You think, perhaps, because the old committee have not brought him out they cannot support him. Well, we have formed a new one; Tom Cliviger is the chairman, and the old committee cannot help rallying to us before the nomination. In the end your cousin will get the undivided support of the Conservative party. Then what you may call the accidents are all in our favour. Old Hopps would be a bad candidate at the best. He is a poor speaker, and personally unpopular; and, to cap all, the chairman of his committee, and several of his leading supporters, are the principal promoters of the lock-out. The hands will be all against him. Now, your cousin——"

"What is the use of talking in that way, Slasher?" interrupted Bob. "The Conservative masters are just as responsible for the lock-out as the Liberals."

"Quite true; but the Liberals have been more to the front, and that makes all the difference. This lock-out has been a stupid thing from the first. I am going to open my mill tomorrow; the others may do as they like. Your brother was quite right. If the Liberals had only brought him out now, instead of old Hopps, they would have won in a canter. What business have we to be helping the Ribbleton masters to under-pay their hands, I should like to know? I never——"

"Hullo!" shouted Gully.

"Hullo!" echoed Bob.

"Oh, my goodness, what is the matter?" exclaimed Cop-skewer, turning pale.

"Why, what is the row?" said Slasher, who, being Irish on the spindle side, had a born liking for rows.

The cause of these exclamations was a tremendous uproar in the street, followed by a great crash of splintered glass and a terrific outburst of cheers and groans.

The "lads in clogs" mentioned by Sagar were smashing the windows of the "Rainbow;" for the house was looked upon by the hands as the masters' headquarters, and considered, therefore, as deserving exemplary punishment.

The window of Gully's room was fortunately not to the front. The inmates could, therefore, look out without much risk of getting their heads broken with brickbats, or their faces cut with splinters of glass. But their position enabled them to see only what Slasher called the tail-end of the crowd, which seemed to consist rather of lookers-on than of active participators in the riot. Among the former were several policemen—too few,

unfortunately, to interfere with the rioters, who numbered several hundreds.

A few minutes after the first volley of stones a cab drove up the street which ran under Gully's window, and was proceeding quietly past, or rather through, the crowd, when it suddenly became the object of considerable attention. The horse's head was seized, people ran from all sides towards the vehicle, and the policemen, doubtless with the intention of protecting the inmates from ill-usage, made hastily in the same direction.

"Who are they?" said Robert Ryvington. "Who can they be, I wonder?"

"I don't know who they are," observed Gully, "but I know I am precious glad I am here, and not in that cab. I would not change places with them for fifty pounds—no, nor for a hundred."

"Gad!" exclaimed Slasher, excitedly, "I believe it's Stubbins—yes, it is. I can see his face, and the other is old Twister, president and vice-president of the Masters' Association, the two most hated men in the town. You are right, Gully; I would not be in their shoes for any money. If those policemen cannot get to them, they'll get half punched to death; and I daresay Stubbins is half dead with fear already."

As Slasher spoke a four-wheeled drag and pair came in sight, following almost in the wake of the cab. In the front were two gentlemen; a servant in livery sat behind. When the drag could advance no farther, owing to the press, the gentlemen jumped out, and, after speaking a few words to the servant, plunged into the crowd.

"Is not that your brother, Mr. Robert?" asked Slasher.

"It's my brother and Kalougia," replied Bob, with heightened colour and glittering eyes; "they are going to help Stubbins and Twister, and I am going to help them. Who will go with me?"

"I will," said Slasher. "Come on, lads. Who's for a fight?"

"That is exactly the thing I want," remarked Bob, as he picked up a thick walking-stick with a big knob that somebody had left in the umbrella-stand. It belonged to Copskewer, who had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared at the time of the window smashing. He was found, an hour later, under a sofa in the next room in a state of utter collapse.

"I'll go, too," exclaimed Gully, after a moment's hesitation. "They shall see that, tailor though I be, I have the spirit of a man. But I must temper courage with prudence. I will not encounter clogs weaponless a second time. What can I get? By

the Lord Harry, here's the very tool! Hurrah!" And, seizing a salamander which the boots had left in the grate when he made the fire, John rushed after the others, who were already half way downstairs.

CHAPTER XLI.

CHARGE, BLEZZARD, CHARGE—ON, GULLY, ON.

THERE was no possibility of egress by the front door. Not only had it been barred, bolted, and barricaded, but the lads in clogs were so many, and their appearance was so threatening, that it would have been impossible to force a way through them, and foolish to attempt it. So Bob and his friends were compelled to make a strategic movement to the rear, and proceed to the scene of action by the back door and through the "Rainbow" yard.

A powerful diversion had meanwhile been effected in favour of Red Randle and the two men whom he and Kalougia were endeavouring to rescue. The latter had hardly reached the spot where the handful of policemen were trying to defend Stubbins and Twister from the onslaught of the lock-outs, and getting much the worst of it, when a man on horseback came at a sharp trot down the narrow street, and, greeting Randle's groom, whom he seemed to know, asked what was up.

The man was our old friend Jack Blezzard. His riding equipment and his steed were equally remarkable. He wore an old-fashioned, weather-stained drab coat, ornamented with enormous brass buttons, a red-plush waistcoat, corduroy trousers, fastened round his ankles with twine, and a white hat a good deal the worse for wear. Round his neck was twisted a scarlet comforter, and in his right hand he flourished a big iron-handled hunting crop. His saddle was black with age, and, if his stirrups had been a hundred years old, they could not have been rustier. His horse was a great, long-bodied, raw-boned, piebald, marked very like a cow. Its face was black on one side, and white on the other. It had a big Roman nose, a ewe neck, and the merest apology for a tail. Jack had got Geroff (Lancashire for giraffe) from a travelling menagerie, shortly after the poor beast had had the greater part of his tail bitten off by a bear, in exchange for a dead cart horse and a few loads of sawdust. Geroff was certainly "a rum 'un to look at," but his master protested, and with truth, that he was "a rare 'un to go."

'And is Mester Red Randle yon?' asked Blezzard, pointing to where the struggle was going on.

"He is," answered the groom, "and I am feared he'll be getting some sore bones. There's too many on 'em for him and Mr. Kalongia and them twothry policemen to best, I'm thinking."

"Yo' are reyt, there is. But it'll never do for Mester Randle to be hurt. Some on us mun help him."

And then, rising in his stirrups, and waving his old white hat round his head, Jack shouted at the top of his voice, and it was not a weak one:

"Come on, lads. Who'll feyt for Red Ryvington? Who'll feyt for Red Ryvington, th' best fren as yo' han, lads? Who'll feyt for Red Ryvington?"

"Me, me, me," cried a score of stalwart fellows. "Where is he?"

"Yon, among them policemen; and if he is not soon helped they'll be punching him to death. Come on, lads, who'll feyt for Red Ryvington?"

"I will," said the burly blacksmith who had helped to carry Randle across the square on the night of the masters' meeting; and by way of a beginning he knocked down a great hulking fellow who was standing hard by, hands in pocket, quietly looking on.

"Ger up and feyt, thou gret lazy beggar. Connot thou," exclaimed the blacksmith, as he started to follow Jack Blezzard, who was already pressing his piebald into the thick of the crowd. When attempts were made to stop him Jack had only to pinch Geroff behind the saddle, whereupon the sagacious creature would kick and plunge with a vigour that scattered his assailants like foam before the wind.

When Robert Ryvington and the others arrived on the scene of action they had no need to ask how things stood. Even if they had not recognised Blezzard and Geroff, the shouts of "Hurrah for Red Ryvington," mingled with cries of "Down with owd Stubbins," would have been sufficient to inform them. They followed quickly in the train of Jack and his volunteers and had not much difficulty in reaching the neighbourhood of the cab, where Randle and the policemen were being hardly pressed by an ever-increasing mob of beclugged roughs, who seemed determined, if possible, to "get at" Twister and Stubbins. The latter were cowering at the bottom of the vehicle to avoid the stones and brickbats that were being showered on it from every side.

Randle was well supported by Kalongia. The Russian struck out straight from the shoulder with a vigour which considerably astonished Bob, who had been under the impression that none but Englishmen knew how to use their fists. He was very

nimble, too, and more than once caught the legs of the fellows who were trying to kick him and threw them heels over head. Both he and Randle were hatless, and Kaloungia had received a blow on the head from which the blood was flowing freely. Slasher seemed to be in his element; he laid about him with his stick like an Irishman at Donnybrook Fair. Bob, albeit less powerfully built than his companion, played a good second; but next to Jack Blezzard the hero of the day was unquestionably John Gully. His salamander did terrible execution. Though no longer red it was still very hot, and a grinder in greasy garments and iron clogs who tried to wrest it from him let it go like lightning, and, clapping his fingers in his mouth, howled dismally. A big coalheaver stood in John's way and defied him to "come on." John touched him lightly in the pit of the stomach with the tip of his salamander and the coalheaver collapsed.

As the tailor neared the field of battle he found a single policeman hotly engaged with two of the rioters, and getting decidedly the worst of it. John, who like most of his craft had some knowledge of practical anatomy, laid his still warm weapon for an instant on one of the fellows' trousers, where they were most tightly stretched, and rapidly operated in similar fashion on the other, whereupon both, uttering frightful imprecations, turned and fled.

"Revenge is sweet," muttered John. "Those are two of the beggars that kicked me the other Thursday. I marked them then, and by the piper that played before Moses, I have marked them now."

The reinforcements brought up by Jack Blezzard were not long in turning the tide of battle; the terror caused by the tailor's salamander and the prancings of the piebald steed completed the discomfiture of the lads in clogs, and the cab, the prize of victory, was led triumphantly into the "Rainbow" yard.

Twister took the affair very coolly, but the face of Stubbins expressed the extremity of fear. He reeled like a drunken man, and his eyes were probably farther out of his head than they had ever been before.

"That wor gradely weel done, that wor," said Twister. "I thowt we wor going to get wer heyds knocked off at one time, an' bith mon, we should ha' done, but for Mr. Rivington and Blezzard here. We'll stan' glasses round for this, willn't we, Mr. Stubbins?"

Stubbins, putting his hand in his breeches pocket, gave an apoplectic sort of nod, intended doubtless to signify acquiescence in his friend's proposal, the greatest employer

of labour in the borough being still too much frightened to speak.

There were many in the yard who had taken no part in the rescue; but it was impossible to discriminate, and cheese and bread, and whatever they liked to drink, were ordered for all alike.

"No, thank you," said Blezzard, in reply to a pressing invitation from Twister, "I never sup nowt, I'm a totaler" (Jack objected to "teetotaler" as being a word of intolerable length). "But I'll sell you summut if yo' like. Durned yo' want ony bobbins, or pickers, or shuttles, or wheel grease, or a new cart, nor nowt o' that soort. Or I'll sell yo' a hoss. I've two gradely ansum cowts, rising five—they'll be worth a mint o' money some day—an' a chestnut mare, welly thoroughbred, as ud just do to run i' your new phaeton, Mr. Twister. What dun yo' say, now?"

"Well, I think you do deserve a horder, Blezzard. You can send us one hundred gross o' winders' bobbins, one hundred throstles, and a twothry shuttles—let me see—thirty or forty dozen."

"All right," said Jack, entering the order in a greasy pocket-book, which he took from the crown of his hat. "Ony hosses?"

"No, I think not, to-day, Blezzard. But I don't know—if yo'd sell th' piebald, now, we might happen trade. What's th' price on him?" asked Twister, with a good-humoured yet somewhat sarcastic laugh.

"A thousand sovereigns, but I'll take less fro' yo' than fro' onybody else; you shall have him for five hundred," said Blezzard, with the utmost gravity. "He's a rare 'un, he is." There isn't such another tit i' th' country side. He can feyt, mon. He geet howd o' one chap, as wor wrastlin' wi' a policeman, by th' breeches behind and lifted him cleyn off his legs. He's worth ony brass, a hoss like this is. What sayen yo', now; will yo' trade?"

"But it would hardly be fair to favver [favour] me i' that fashion, Blezzard, would it? Why would yo' take less fro' me than fro' onybody else?"

"'Cause yo'd match him so weel," said Jack, with a grin.

This sally elicited a roar of laughter, for Twister was a long-limbed, ungainly man, the reverse of fat, with a big head and a very thin face, and almost as droll-looking as Blezzard's piebald tit.

After Randle had expressed his thanks to Blezzard for his timely help, and received the acknowledgments of Stubbins and Twister for the service he had rendered them, he accompanied Kalogia to Gully's room in the "Rainbow" to repair damages.

They were not much the worse. A basin of warm water, Gully's needle, and a piece of sticking plaister for the Russian's head quickly put them to rights.

"Well, I must say," observed Randle, "that for a lover of the people, and a believer in the virtues of the working classes, you laid about you very vigorously just now, Kalougia. I wonder how many you knocked down and tripped up? What do you think of your *protégées* now?"

"I don't think any the worse of them," returned the Russian, philosophically, "for what they have done to-day. They were excited, that is all; and when people so far yield to excitement as to become violent, they must be opposed, and, if necessary, restrained. And they had cause for excitement; they had been unjustly treated. If their employers had not locked them out there would have been none of this trouble, for they would have been in the factories, and not in the streets."

"That is true enough, and, as you know, I am far from approving of the lock-out. Still, I do not think it is fair to saddle the masters with all the responsibility of these disturbances. It just amounts to this: they have chosen to close their mills for a while, after proper notice. Surely that is within their strict right?"

"Within their legal right, perhaps, but not within their moral right. The community, of which the workmen form a part, just as much as the masters, protects the latter in the enjoyment of the capital which the labour of others has created for them. Hence capitalists are doubly responsible—to the society which protects them, and to the labourers [who have made them. If capitalists—I don't care whether they are manufacturing capitalists or landowning capitalists—are under an obligation to make a proper use of the possessions which they enjoy solely by favour of their fellow-men, private property loses its justification and social revolution becomes a necessity. It appears to me that this lock-out is a piece of grievous oppression. Because these poor workpeople of Whitebrook use a part of their earnings in a way their employers do not like they are deprived of their right to labour and condemned to death—or at any rate severe suffering—by starvation. No worse act of tyranny was ever perpetrated even by the despotic government of Russia."

"The lock-out is a bad thing," Randle answered, "there can be no doubt about that. But, so far as your remarks imply that the employed have all the virtues and the employers all the vices, I do not agree with you at all. Neither do I think that the institution of private property is anything but a good thing, though like all good things it has its incidental evils. If capital is created by labour it is saved by the thrifty, and the more

capital there is in a country the better it is for the classes whom it provides with remunerative work. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. During the last half century capital in this country has increased enormously, and wages, except, perhaps, in the agricultural districts, have risen *pari passu*. Don't suppose, however, that I think we have reached perfection; there are many and terrible evils in our social system; but the only cure for them is more light and healthier public opinion, I don't hold, however, that because a man has large possessions he should lead an idle life; and I hope the day will come when a social ban will be placed upon people who live on their rents and their dividends, and do nothing but amuse themselves. They don't think it, perhaps, but they are a little better than swindlers, and almost as dangerous. There is my cousin Randle, now, I don't believe he ever did an honest day's work in all his life, and if——"

"Hallo! Randle, my boy, glad to see you are all alive. How do you do, Mr. Kalougia? I hope you are not much hurt?"

The speaker was Deep Randle, who having heard that his cousin was badly hurt, and Kalougia all but killed, had hurried over from his headquarters at the "Mitre" to ascertain by personal inquiry how far the story was true. He was not very anxious on his namesake's account, but he would have been very sorry if the Russian had got knocked on the head—just then.

"I hope this will not prevent you from going on to Deepdene," he observed, after a short conversation about the riot and the election. "Dora is expecting you, and I shall of course join you at dinner."

When they encountered the mob, Red Randle and Kalougia were on their way to Deepdene, the former to bring back his mother, who had gone thither with Dora a few days previously, the latter in fulfilment of his promise to make a visit to the Park.

After a feeble protest that he was hardly in a condition, with his plastered head and scratched nose, to present himself before ladies, the Russian acquiesced in his host's proposal, and he and Red Randle resumed the journey which had been so rudely interrupted.

Before Deep Randle returned to the "Mitre," he asked his cousin for his vote and interest.

"I cannot vote for you, Randle," said the other, kindly, for he thought if his uncle's son could get into Parliament, and begin to take a serious interest in politics, it might have a favourable effect on his character. "It would be contrary to my principles. But I have no great admiration for your opponent; and I promise you one thing: I will do no more than vote for him, and

I shall neither speak nor in any way use my influence in his favour or against you."

This answer was very satisfactory to Deep Randle. His cousin had considerable influence in the borough, and was just then very popular, and he had greatly feared that Red Ryvington would be among the Liberal candidate's most active supporters.

Blezzard's services on this day, so remarkable in the annals of Whitebrook, won him both profit and renown. The order he received from Twister was followed by several others. He opened a valuable connection with the firm of which Mr. Stubbins was the head, and the mention of his name in the papers brought him business from many other quarters.

John Gully was less fortunate; for albeit he received great praise, which was very grateful to him, he received something else, which has embittered his life ever since. The week after the fight, when he was hurrying, just as the factories were "loosing," from the Rainbow inn to Whitebrook station, a group of lads in clogs and lasses in shawls saluted him, amid a chorus of laughter, as "Salamander Jack." The cry was taken up by others, and it followed him all the way to the booking-office door. A similar unpleasant incident happened a few weeks later. The nickname still sticks to him; and John finds it so very disagreeable that he is seriously thinking of disposing of his Whitebrook business to some brother snip who has not earned unenviable fame by exchanging the goose of peace for the salamander of war.

CHAPTER XLII.

DEEP RANDLE'S LITTLE GAME.

FOUR thousand and fifty votes for Randle Ryvington, of Deepdene Park, gentleman; three thousand four hundred and ninety for Jeremiah Hopps, of Whitebrook, brewer, was the result of the poll, as announced by the mayor at eleven o'clock p.m. on the day of the election.

Many people were greatly surprised that Deep Randle had won at all; that he should have won by so large a majority astonished all Whitebrook, and nobody more than Mr. Cliviger and himself.

"I reckoned on a hundred, or, at most a hundred and fifty," the astute Thomas said. "But five hundred and sixty! That beats cock-fighting. The Liberals are licked this go, and no

mistake. Regularly knocked out of time, by Jingo! I don't think they'll come up to the scratch at all the next time. At any rate, they'll not run old Hopps, though he has a hundred and fifty tied houses, and no end of tin."

The times were critical, political feeling ran high, and the election excited considerable attention as well in Lancashire as in the country at large. All the London papers made it the subject of leading articles. The *Trimmer* observed that, although it was a common error to over-estimate the importance of by-elections, yet the result of the contest at Whitebrook was not without its significance, and both of the great political parties into which the nation was divided might learn from it a useful lesson. It might well serve as a caution to the Tories and a warning to the Liberals, and it would be as unwise for the former to regard it as a great victory as for the latter to deplore it as a great disaster, etc.

The *Daily Light* said that, albeit the Conservatives would doubtless hail the election of Mr. Ryvington as an important success, as another proof of the Conservative reaction of which they were always pretending to discern the signs, and as a pre-sage of still more brilliant victories to come, it could be regarded at the utmost as no more than a drawn battle. Mr. Ryvington had triumphed less because he was a Tory than because his opponent was a brewer. Whitebrook was one of the soberest communities in the kingdom. Many of the electors were teetotalers first and Liberals afterwards. It was against their conscience to vote for the producer of an article which they looked upon as a thing accursed. They voted for Mr. Ryvington, in fact, not because they loved him more, but because they loved his opponent less. This was the simple and natural explanation of an event which seemed so much to surprise some of the *Daily Light's* contemporaries, and the *Daily Light* had the utmost confidence that if the Liberals of Whitebrook could fight the battle over again with a better candidate, they would retrieve their defeat, and return him at the head of the poll.

At a time when imperial interests were at stake, and the fate of England was trembling in the balance, the *Daily Trumpet* declined to discuss the Whitebrook election from the paltry standpoint of party politics. The mental horizon of Mr. Hopps seemed to be limited to the narrow, though glorious, island in which he lived. He had never studied, as he was constrained to admit, the geography of Kamschatka or the history of Timbuctoo. He was unaware—he did not even seem to suspect—that the Emperor of China, the King of Siam, and the Mikado of Japan had entered into an unholy alliance for the conquest of our price-less Empire of the East. Mr. Ryvington was a man of another

mould. He advocated a vigorous foreign policy. He was resolved, so far as in him lay, to transmit to our posterity, intact and undiminished, that magnificent heritage which we had received from a long line of heroic ancestors, and, come weal, come woe, to retain in our hands those splendid possessions into which Heaven had ordained that we should carry the light of civilisation and the blessings of the Gospel. The election of Mr. Ryvington by so splendid and unexampled a majority showed that the great heart of Lancashire was true to the best traditions of English greatness, and that the teachings of the *Daily Trumpet* had not been in vain.

Deep Randle read these effusions with great delight. A week ago he had been a nobody—save in his own estimation—and now he felt as if all England had its eye upon him. As he sat in his room two or three days after the election, a pile of papers, every one of which had made him the subject of a leading article, on a chair by his side, and a pile of letters addressed to "Randle Ryvington, Esq., M.P.," on the table before him, he saw himself in imagination the husband of a lady of title and fortune, the greatest man in the county—perhaps even a baronet, possibly even a peer. The estate he looked upon as already his. After those leading articles, after the compliments he had received from the papers of his party for having wrested a seat from the Liberals, every Tory drawing-room in London would be open to him, and he might choose at his leisure a bride with the necessary qualification, and wealth and beauty in addition. He began to look upon his father's will, which he had once regarded as a misfortune, as a positive blessing; for had it not caused him to stand for Whitebrook, an enterprise that, in ordinary circumstances, he would never have had the audacity to attempt, and placed greatness within his reach?

"Yes," thought Randle, as he toyed with his letters (the contemplation of the magic capitals appended to his name giving him unspeakable pleasure), "my father knew what he was about, after all. He had a long head. If he could only have foreseen that, within a twelvemonth of his death, his son would be member for the borough, and marry a 'lady,' he would have died happy. The next thing is to find the lady—the sooner the better, perhaps. There is no telling what Dora may do. It won't do to be too confident. I must not play the part of the hare in the fable. Encourage Dora to fall in love with this Russian fellow, and be looking out myself at the same time—that is my little game. By Jove! what is this?"

One of the letters was sealed with a coronet. It seemed an answer to his thoughts.

"Already!" he exclaimed, joyfully; for he was vain enough to imagine that the missive might contain an invitation from some peer desirous of making his acquaintance; and he looked a second time to see if the letter was really addressed to him.

Yes, there was no mistake on that point: "Randle Ryvington, Esq., M.P., Whitebrook, Lancashire."

Then he opened the letter with great circumspection, using for the purpose a paper-knife, and taking particular care not to damage the seal. He meant to put the envelope (coronet upwards) into the card-basket on the drawing-room table, so that all the house, and everybody who called, might know what a great man he was becoming, and how high and mighty were his friends. But no sooner had he cast his eye over the letter than his look of elation was exchanged for one of bitter disappointment and disgust.

"Hang that!" was the new M.P.'s emphatic comment, as he threw the coroneted envelope into one corner of the room, and the letter into the other.

After this outburst he fell into a reverie which lasted several minutes. Its conclusion was marked by a big thump on the table, and an exclamation that seemed to denote some important resolve.

"I will!" he muttered through his set teeth. "It is a chance not to be missed. I'll risk it."

Whereupon he picked up the letter which had caused him so much perturbation of spirit, and proceeded to write the reply it seemed to demand. The task appeared to be no easy one; for, although the answer was short, the agony of composition was long, and Randle wrote and rewrote his letter many times before he got it entirely to his mind. The next thing was to direct the missive, after which, with a muttered, "I'll post this myself," he placed the mysterious epistle in his pocket.

Then he took up the coroneted envelope and the letter which had been enclosed therein, and, after a few minutes' painful hesitation, threw both into the fire, on the principle, as he said to himself, that burnt letters, like dead men, tell no tales. This done, he rang the bell, and ordered the servant who answered his summons to tell Giles to bring Topsy round to the front door.

Topsy was a fast-trotting hack, and in less than half an hour Deep Randle was riding up the steep, straggling, and sombre street by which Whitebrook is entered from the north. As he passed the post-office he dropped into the box with his own hands the letter that had cost him so much pains to write. Then he went on to the warehouse of Messrs. Thomas Oliviger and Co., where he found the head of the firm standing at the door with a

straw in his mouth, examining with critical eye several cartloads of yarn which were on the point of departure.

"How's the M.P. for Whitebrook to-day?" he exclaimed, so soon as he caught sight of Randle. "Won't you come in for a moment? One of these fellows will hold Topsy. Would you like her put up? No? All right. Here you, Roger, walk Mr. Ryvington's mare about. Take care you don't let her stand still and get cold."

"This is my private office, No. 1," said Tom Oliviger, as he ushered his visitor into a large and severely business-like room. The furniture consisted of a few chairs and a plain writing table, strewn with books of account and samples of yarn. The walls were covered with diagrams showing the fluctuations in the prices of cotton, yarns, consols, and calicoes for twenty years back. Over the mantel-piece hung a huge map of the world, on which the great ocean steam routes were marked in red lines, and the natural productions and principal manufactures of every civilised country indicated by an ingenious system of hieroglyphics.

"This is where I receive my customers and clients. And this," he continued, throwing open a glass door, "is my private office, No. 2. Here I receive my particular friends, and now and again a customer who is not too strait-laced to enjoy a cigar and a glass of sherry."

The second room was the very converse of the first. The furniture and fittings of it were almost luxurious. The walls were adorned with pictures of race-horses, prize cattle, hunting scenes, and of moving accidents by flood and field. In place of the big map in No. 1 was a portrait of the yarn agent himself, and his horse, Jumping Jerry, as they appeared at a certain steeplechase (owners up), in which Tom had won the second prize, a silver cup, that stood in the centre of the mantel-piece under a glass shade.

"Have a glass of wine, Ryvington?" said Oliviger, as soon as his friend was comfortably seated in a cosy smoking chair, at the same time pushing towards him a cigar box filled with "cabana kings."

Deep Randle accepted the offer and helped himself to a "king," and after a short conversation about nothing in particular, he imparted to his friend the purpose of his visit. It was to inquire about the promissory note for £3,000 he had signed for Oliviger some six months previously, which would shortly fall due.

"Oh, the note," said Tom, carelessly, as if it were the merest trifle. "You need not trouble yourself about that. The bank will renew, and glad to do it"

"But I want to know how much I have to pay, and have a squaring up," urged Randle, who, though not a business man, would hardly have been his father's son had he not possessed some business instincts and a keen sense of the value of money. "How much has the election cost?"

"Too soon to tell yet. I have not got the agent's statement, and the bills are not all in by a long way."

"But you know how much you have paid so far. You can form an idea."

"Yes, I can form an idea," returned Cliviger, leaning back in his chair, and looking keenly at the M.P. through the smoke of his cigar. "There won't be much left out of that bill, perhaps nothing at all."

"Then I shall have it all to pay myself?" said Ryvington, repressing with difficulty an almost irrepressible desire to give the yarn agent a piece of his mind.

"That is about the size of it," answered the other, coolly. "But, as I said just now, the bank will renew, if it's any convenience."

"No. I think I would rather pay it," rejoined Randle, who, though paying in any circumstances was no great pleasure to him, had a strong feeling that it would be both *infra dig.* and inexpedient for the newly-elected member for Whitebrook to seem short of money. "But £3,000 is a very heavy sum for expenses, isn't it? I never heard of any candidate spending more than twelve or fourteen hundred at previous elections."

"Of course you never heard. Do you think candidates are so green as to publish in the papers all that they spend? Have you never heard of the difference between official and actual expenses? There are some things a newly-elected member should know nothing about, and this is one of them. Leave it all to me, and keep yourself as much in the dark as possible. And even if your election has cost £3,000, what of that? Are there not hundreds who would pay ten times as much to be able to write 'M.P.' after their names? And there are special reasons in your case, you know. You may think what you like, Ryvington, but you are a lucky fellow. Shut your eyes and be thankful, that is my advice. As for this promissory note, if you would really prefer to pay it, by all means do so. The bank will be all the readier to do something of the sort another time. You can give me a cheque, and I will see to it."

"What is the use of troubling you, Tom? I'll call one of these days and take it up myself."

"As you like, Ryvington," said the other, drily. "And when I have got all the accounts in, you shall have a correct statement and the balance, if there be any."

"I may be going away for a few days next week," remarked Randle, as he rose to take his leave; "perhaps you will kindly look after the hounds for me a bit, and arrange the fixtures."

"Going away and hunting only just beginning! But perhaps there is a 'lady' in the case. Have you heard of a suitable *partie* already?"

"Not exactly, but it is possible I may hear of one before long?"

"All right," said Tom, with a wink. "I understand. Yes, I'll look after the hounds for you."

"Confound the fellow's impudence," muttered Randle, as he rode slowly homeward. "What business has he to wink at me, I should like to know? He is too familiar by half. And that £3,000, I am almost sure it's a dead swindle. But what can I do? I am in his power, and must just submit, dash him!—shut my eyes, as he says: but I'll be hanged if I am thankful."

"Yes, I understand," repeated Tom Oliviger, as he helped himself to a fourth glass of sherry in his private office No. 2; "and I understand something else. He means to pay that bill himself because he won't trust me with the money. He thinks I might apply it to some other purpose, and leave him in the lurch, as if my name were not on the note as well as his, the fool. He had better not begin to cut up rough; if he does, I'll deuced soon be even with him. But never mind, I have made £1,500 out of the transaction—not a bad profit on £3,000, and got a good lift out of him into the bargain."

And then Mr. Oliviger took a fifth glass of sherry, and solaced himself with another cigar.

CHAPTER XLIII

MRS. RYVINGTON TALKS TO HER SON.

MRS. RYVINGTON never had been a very joyful woman. It was her nature, if not her pleasure, to look at the dark side of things, and meet trouble half way. But she was not of the querulous sort that are constantly complaining, and take a delight in confiding their griefs to all who can be persuaded to listen thereto; and as her sons generally made light of her anxieties, which in truth were often either exaggerated or imaginary, she had fallen into the habit of cherishing her sorrows in secret. It was only on special occasions that she imparted them even to Randle, who understood her better than any one else, and who knew that under a somewhat cold exterior,

due rather to early training than to natural bent, she concealed a shrewd understanding and a tender heart.

One afternoon, a few weeks after the Whitebrook election, Randle entered his mother's room, where she sat alone busied with her knitting. She had chosen the room because it overlooked the factories. She liked to see the hands pass to and from their work, to watch the carts laden with cotton, coals, and pieces, as they went and came. She was never so content as when, after the mills were lighted up on a winter evening and all was quiet, she could sit in the darkness and listen to the faint hum which told her that all was well, that thousands of deft fingers were earning good wages for their owners and an honest profit (a favourite expression of hers) for her sons. She liked, too, to know how the markets were going, whether prices were good or bad, and if the concern was solicitous to keep up its ancient reputation for fair dealing and good work.

Albeit she was careful never to say so, Mrs. Ryvington had a particular pride in her eldest son—in his scientific acquirements, business aptitude, and, above all, in the esteem in which he was held by all who knew him.

"I am glad you have come, Randle," she said, as he opened the door, for though it was twilight, and she could not distinguish his features, she had recognised his footstep on the stairs. "I wanted to talk to you."

"About anything particular, mother?"

"Yes, it is something I have had on my mind for some time, but I did not like mentioning it before. I feared you might think I was making myself uneasy and troubling you without cause. How much longer is Mr. Kalougia going to stay?"

"Oh, Kalougia is the trouble, is he?" answered Randle, in a tone of banter. "Why, I thought you rather liked him. What has he done amiss?"

"I am sorry for him, but I don't like him to be making such a long stay. He came for a visit of a few days, and he has now been here two months!"

"You forget, mother; he is at Deepdene."

"That makes it all the worse. If he had stayed with us, and helped you in the laboratory, as he did at first, I should not have minded, but he spends more than half his time at the Park hunting and shooting."

"And no wonder, seeing how much they make of him. My cousin has taken to Kalougia as he never took to anybody before. He won't let him come here for a day if he can help it."

"Of course he won't. Cannot you guess why?"

"You surely don't think ——"

"I think, nay, I am sure, that your cousin Randle is trying to make a match between this Russian and Dora. If you had not been so wrapped up in your business and your experiments you would have seen it long since yourself."

"Well, that is a new light, mother, and no mistake. I dare say you are right, though. Women have sharper eyes for these things than men. Yes, it would suit Randle's purpose very well. But Dora. I don't think Dora cares about Kalougia, do you?"

"I am not sure. I am rather afraid she does. In any case, Randle, you ought to take some steps. You were the means of bringing Kalougia here, remember, and we know nothing about him except what he has told us himself."

"That is true, mother," said Randle; "but I think Kalougia is a decent fellow for all that."

"I hope so. But he has been in prison, and it is always against a man to have been in prison. I daresay the Russian government would give a very different account of him from what he gave us. Be that as it may, I should be very sorry for Dora to marry him, on several grounds."

"So should I. As I have said, I think Kalougia is a man of honour; still we know nothing of his antecedents except what he has told us himself; of his means we know even less, and his prospects do not seem to be particularly brilliant. It would be an imprudent marriage, to say the least, and, what I should particularly regret, Dora would lose every vestige of interest in her father's estate. For you may depend upon it, that now Randle is in Parliament, he will not be long in finding the sort of wife he wants."

"And there is another reason that weighs with me more than any other," said Mrs. Ryvington, in a tone of great earnestness. "I don't like to say it, but I very much fear Mr. Kalougia is an infidel. He has only been twice with us to church, and I noticed that he yawned several times during the sermon. Yet I am sure they were excellent discourses. Mr. Owlett knows the truth, and proclaims it with no uncertain voice. And did not Mr. Kalougia say something about those Nihilists who died in prison, or were executed, being at rest? How does he know they are at rest? I do not think, from what he said, that they were converted persons. If you could get a lord for her," continued the old lady, after a pause, of which her son did not avail himself to offer any observation, "a nice, steady young man, of proper principles—that would be the best."

"That is very easily said, mother; but how would you go about it?" Randle, though inwardly much amused, remarked, with becoming gravity.

"I think it might be done," replied Mrs. Ryvington, in a tone which implied that she had thought the matter well over. "Mr. Pleasington has agents in London; I once heard your father say they were a well-connected firm. Now, why could not they be asked to look out for a suitable person—if it were made worth their while, I mean. I am sure there is many a nobleman's son who would be glad to marry Dora, if they only knew."

"And her money," put in Randle, with a laugh. "Unquestionably. But how about Dora? Suppose she refuses to have anything to do with your nice young nobleman of correct principles?"

"That is a difficulty—the chief difficulty, one might say; for Dora is very wilful. Still I think it might be got over. I would not introduce the young man in his true character all at once. For instance, if his name was Lord, Lord——"

"Lord Tom Noddy," suggested Randle.

"Lord Tom Noddy!" said Mrs. Ryvington, pensively. "It seems to me that I have heard that name before—or seen it in a book. But never mind that. Well, in that case I would introduce him to Dora as Mr. Thomas Noddy. We might have him here for a few days; or Mr. Pleasington would perhaps invite him—he has a very nice house—and not tell her he was a lord until she began to take an interest in the young man."

"How if she did not take an interest in him, mother?"

"I hope she would take an interest in him. In any case, we should have the satisfaction of knowing that we had done our best and left no stone unturned. And if nothing came of it, no harm would be done."

"It might be a terrible disappointment for the nice young nobleman, though."

"That would not matter much. Men are not affected by disappointments as women are. And if he failed to please her he would have nobody to blame but himself, you know."

"Well, mother," said Randle, with perfect seriousness, "I think I must mention your scheme to Mr. Pleasington, and see if he is willing to play the part in it you assign to him. But the first thing is to see Dora, and find out if she is at all spoons on Kalougia. Whether or not he is on her does not matter, I suppose. If I appeal to her in the double character of cousin and guardian, I think that she will tell me."

"I am sure she will. I never knew a more open girl; and she always was fond of you, Randle. Oh, if it might only have pleased the Lord ——"

"Never mind that, mother," interposed her son. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll ride over to the Park to-morrow afternoon."

My cousin and Kalongia are going on a shooting excursion, Robert tells me, and I daresay I shall find Dora alone, or, what amounts to the same thing, there will be nobody with her but her aunt Ford."

CHAPTER XLIV.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

WHEN Randle rode up the avenue at Deepdene on his visit to Dora, the day was far spent. A keen frost had hardened the roads and rarified the air, and trees and hills were sharply defined in the ruddy light of the setting sun. Randle was musing on the singular chance that had brought him into so close relations with Kalongia, and asking himself what might be the issue of their acquaintance—how his cousin would answer the question he had come to ask her, and how he should put it to her, when, at a turn in the road, he caught sight of the object of his thoughts a few yards in advance of him.

A minute afterwards he was by her side.

As she turned to greet him he thought he had never seen Dora looking so well. The sadness of her attire, for she still wore mourning, was in striking contrast with the brightness of her face, and it seemed to Randle that there was a light in her eye he had never seen there before.

"This is indeed a pleasure," she exclaimed, as he slid from his horse and offered her his arm. "It seems an age since I saw you. I was beginning to fear you were forgetting me, and that, you know, would be a double dereliction of duty—for are you not my guardian, and am I not your ward?"

"I was never in less danger of forgetting you than now, my dear Dora, though it is more than a fortnight since we met; and my presence here this afternoon is proof that I am not derelict to my duty as one of your guardians."

"Oh, then, you have come to see me about business. What is it, Ran?"

"Well, if it is not exactly business, it is something that concerns you very nearly. But where is all the world?"

"If you mean my brother and Ser—Mr. Kalongia—all our world has gone a-shooting, and won't be back for an hour or more."

"God bless me!" thought Randle, "she nearly called him Sergius; that does not bode well for my mission, I'm afraid."

"What is it, Ran," said Dora, after pausing for a reply—"this something that so nearly concerns me?"

"Well, I think the best way of entering on the subject is to ask you a question."

"As my guardian?"

"No, Dora; I would rather not put it in that light. I would rather ask it as your cousin who, when you were a wee baby, and he was a small boy, dandled you on his knee; who romped with you when you were a little girl; who has always loved you as a brother, and who promised your father on his death-bed to cherish you as a sister."

Dora placed her hand in his, as she used to do when they were children together.

"Dear brother Ran," she said, "ask and I will answer."

"How do you like Sergius Kalougia?"

"Is there any reason why I should not like him, Ran?" answered the girl, softly, with drooping eyes, while a blush, bright as the setting sun, overspread face and neck.

"I know no reason why you should not like him—I like him myself; but there are good reasons why you should not—it is best to speak plainly—why you should not love him."

Here Randle paused; but as his cousin made no sign he continued:

"He is a foreigner and a stranger; that alone is sufficient reason why. As I have said, I like Kalougia. I like him very well. I believe he is a man of honour—a gentleman, in fact. But I am not infallible—I may easily be mistaken. All we know of his antecedents is of his own telling, recollect; and, although I have faith in the man, I should not consider it right to act on that assumption in any important matter—to accept him as a partner, for instance—without some independent testimony to his good faith."

"Is that all, Ran?" said Dora, quietly.

"Not by a great deal," returned Randle, who, albeit he felt he was labouring in vain, considered it his duty to say all he had come to say. "Kalougia is an exile, a man without a home, and married life without a home seems something like a contradiction in terms. And I am not quite sure that, even if he were allowed to return to Russia, it would be any better (I mean for his wife, if he should marry some English girl). You know what wild ideas he has about politics and that. He would be mixing himself up with those secret societies again, and either get sent to Siberia, or worse. In any case, Dora, I don't think you would like to become a Russian, and pass all your life away from England and the friends who love you. I cannot tell you how much it would grieve me, Dora, and I know my mother would be very sorry. Still that is nothing; at least not very much. Your happiness is my chief concern."

"Dear Randle," she exclaimed, "how good you are! I know your only object is my happiness, and I take all that you have said in good part. But it is too late. Sergius and I are engaged!"

"So soon," said her cousin, in a hurt voice; "and neither of you thought fit to tell me?"

"Oh, don't speak in that way, Ran. It was only last night, and, if Sergius had not promised to go with my brother to-day, you would have been informed this very morning. He is going to see you to-morrow. We both wanted you to know before anybody else."

"I am afraid it has been a very hasty affair," returned Randle, regretfully. "I did not think Kalougia would have taken advantage——"

"Do not blame Sergius, please," interposed Dora, with some feeling; "if he is to blame, so am I. Let me tell you all about it. Perhaps it will come better from me than from Sergius; for I want you not only to sanction our engagement, both as cousin and guardian, but to help us with the others, who, I daresay, will consider me very foolish. You must not blame Sergius. He won my heart without intending it, as Othello won the heart of Desdemona—by telling his story. Oh, how I pitied him! and pity, you know, is akin to love. And then he told me afterwards many more things about his home and his early life; and he is so good and so brave, so considerate for others and so self-sacrificing, that I—we are speaking as brother and sister, you know, Ran—that I could not help liking him. But I did not know that I loved him, or suspect that he was necessary to my happiness, until yesterday. I felt pleasure in his company, and thought a great deal about him in his absence—that was all. It came upon me like a flash. I was in the conservatory cutting some flowers, when Mr. Kalougia came in, looking very serious and resolute. I had never seen him in such a mood before. He had come to tell me, he said, that he would have to leave Deepdene early on Thursday morning; and, as he might not see me alone to-day, he wanted to take that opportunity of saying how grateful he was for all my kindness and hospitality, and how he should never forget the sympathy I had always expressed for the martyrs and heroes of Russian liberty.

"Oh, Ran, I cannot tell you how I felt when I heard him say that. It seemed as if the light of the sun had suddenly gone out. I knew then for the first time that I loved him; but I did not know that he loved me.

"'But you will come back,' I said; 'you are only going to Redscar. We shall meet again.'

"No, Miss Ryvington, I must go away. I must leave Whitebrook, never, I fear, to return."

"I went on cutting my flowers. I feared to look at him, and I dared not trust myself to speak."

"You will not think ill of me, Miss Ryvington," he continued; and his voice, which a moment before had seemed hard and unfeeling, was now soft and low.

"Oh, why should I think ill of you?" I exclaimed.

"It is a saying we have in Russia when we are parting with a friend, and I thought perhaps——"

"And then he paused, as if unable to go on. I gave a fleeting glance at his face—our eyes met, and I saw that his were filled with tears."

"But why must you go away, Mr. Kalongia?" I asked.

"Because I have indulged in a hopeless love, Miss Ryvington."

"That was his answer; and then, Ran, I cannot tell you what happened. My head was in a whirl. I suppose I must have said something. I only know that I found my hands in his, and—and he discovered that his love was not hopeless, and—I felt very happy, Ran. Then he told me how my likeness to his sister Zeneide had made him love me almost from the first; how, though he had struggled against it, his love had deepened, how at last he had resolved to tear himself away, for he did not think, he said, that I could love, or that any of my friends would allow me to marry, a poor exile like him. You may fancy what I said. I told him I knew differently. I told him I was sure you would be a friend; as for the others, I do not suppose they will make any difficulty, and, if they do, I shall soon be my own mistress, you know. Sergius wanted to tell my brother last night. Oh, he is the soul of honour, Ran, and so thoughtful. But I would not let him. I wanted you to know first, dear old Ran."

"You may count on your brother's consent with the utmost confidence," observed Randle, drily.

"I know what you mean. He will get all the estate. Let him; I don't want it, Ran. I have got something better, the love of a good man. And I shall have some fortune, you know; and Sergius has an estate, I think, and he has his profession. Oh! we shall do very well, Ran; but he will talk to you about all that. And as for what you were saying just now, Sergius said you would of course want to know something more about him, and that you could write to the Russian ambassador in London, who would give every information. And he is not going back to Russia. He has given his word—we—he shall live in England. Now, Ran, are you satisfied now?"

And the girl looked up to her cousin with a face so bright, so smiling, so full of eagerness and happiness, that none but the veriest churl could have helped smiling in return, and Randle, not being a churl, did smile in return.

"You approve, Ran; I knew you would."

"I suppose I must. Even if I did not, it would come to the same thing in the end; for, as you say, you will soon be your own mistress and able to dispose of yourself as you list. And I freely admit that what you tell me removes some of the objections I suggested just now. It is rather droll, though, is it not, for a Nihilist to name the Ambassador of Russia as one of his references."

"Sergius is not a Nihilist, Ran; you know he is not. He is only a Revolutionist," said Dora, with as much warmth as if she were resenting a personal imputation.

"A Revolutionist, then, if you insist on the distinction," returned Randle, with an amused smile at his cousin's impetuosity. "There is one thing more I have to say, and after what has passed I am not sure that I ought to say it. Yet if I do not, somebody else may, and you had better be prepared. Just before I left home my mother was saying—you know what importance she attaches to religion—that she feared Kalougia was an infidel."

"That's because he does not like Mr. Owlett's sermons, I suppose. I am an infidel, too, then, for I do not like them; and I do not think you do, either, Ran."

"My mother is mistaken, Dora," Randle went on; "Kalougia is not an infidel. He is a man of intensely religious character; nevertheless he is not a Christian."

"But, Randle, how can that be—religious, yet not a Christian?"

"I mean that a man who has done the things he has—sacrificed himself for others, and suffered martyrdom for a cause from which he cannot possibly reap any personal benefit—must have a faith in the invisible—something that cannot be seen, handled, or proven—whether he admits it or not. But he professes not to believe in the immortality of the soul, which is the beginning and the end of revealed religion. I am not blaming him, mind; people are little more responsible for their beliefs than for their existence. If I had been exposed to similar influences, I daresay I should have had similar views. Perhaps you will say it is no business of mine what Kalougia thinks; but it was I who brought him here, you know, and it would not be right to keep anything back from you. My sole motive in what I have said is your happiness, dear Dora."

"You are very kind, Ran, and I am truly sorry Sergius is

not a believer. But don't you think that is a good reason why—why——?”

“Why he should have a wife who is a believer?” said Randle, completing the sentence. “Well, perhaps you are right, Dora. And Kalougia is not a stiff-necked unbeliever. I never met a man with a mind more open to conviction. Who knows that you may not bring him to a better way of thinking? But you should think what you will say when people ask why he does not go to church.”

“He will go to church with me,” returned the girl with great decision, “and that will stop their mouths. Besides, people say such absurd things. It has been said that you are a free-thinker, Ran.”

“And so I am, if thinking for himself and not caring for parson-made creeds makes a man a free-thinker. But I am a believer in the Old Book for all that, Dora. I don't go to it for history or science, and I no more believe in the verbal infallibility of it than I believe in the infallibility of the Pope. The Bible is like crude ore which, amid a mass of foreign matter, contains true gold. To those who have faith and are willing to learn, it reveals the Divine will. That is all I want. It lightens my footsteps through the world, helps me to do my duty, and makes life worth living. I do believe that if a man reads the book and strives, however much he may stumble and fall, to follow its teachings, and listens to the higher voice within him, he will be both happier and better. I should fall into black despair if I thought this world was all—if I could not, as Tennyson says, look forward to

“ ‘Some far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.’ ”

I don't know why I am talking to you in this strain, Dora. It must be that we are both in a mood for mutual confidence. I am not sure that I ever told anybody as much of my opinions on religion before. I never told my mother, and she guesses rather than knows that I do not think as she thinks, and as she brought me up to think. I daresay, though, if the truth were known, she believes that I shall come round to her views in the end, and prays that I may. You are right in supposing that I don't much care for old Owlett's sermons—to say the truth, there are few sermons I do care for. But it would pain her if I did not go with her to church, and so I go. Dear old mother, she is as good as gold in spite of her old-fashioned ways. And now, I think, we have about finished our talk. I do most sincerely hope you will be happy in your love. I would rather you had chosen an Englishman; but unless I am greatly mistaken Kalougia, is a

true man, and will make you a good husband. May God bless you both!"

And he bent down and gave Dora a brotherly kiss.

"Thank you, Ran, so much. Sergius will thank you, too. He feared so much you would be against it. Oh! Ran," continued the girl, looking up to him with swimming eyes, "I wish you could be happy too. Tell me, now, tell me truly, don't you love Lady Muriel?"

"I might have done, perhaps," said Randle, dreamily, "if circumstances had been more favourable. But it is better as it is—better not to think of it—the distance between us is too great."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Dora, stamping her foot impatiently on the ground. "There is some great mistake. I am sure there is. The Lindisfarnes could never intend to treat you so cruelly. At any rate, they are human. Let me write to Lady Muriel. She would not take it amiss from me, I am sure. I will not compromise you in the least—do let me."

"Never, Dora. I forbid you to do anything of the sort," replied Randle, almost sternly. "It is better as it is, I tell you."

And then, after saying that he should be glad to see Kalougia at Redscar in the morning, and giving Dora another cousinly kiss, he mounted his horse and rode away.

That same night, before Randle sought his couch, he took the withered bunch of forget-me-nots, given to him by Lady Muriel, from the drawer in which he had so long ago laid them.

"Shall I throw them away?" he asked himself. "They are but the shadow of a dream, and only serve to keep alive a painful memory."

But after a few moments' hesitation he restored the poor flowers to their place, muttering as he did so, "What a fool I am! Why cannot I forget her?"

CHAPTER XLV.

A HARD CASE.

ALL seemed to be going well with Deep Randle, or Mr. Ryvington, as he now expected to be called, and generally was called. He had been member for Whitebrook nearly four months, and he liked the honour and consideration the position brought him exceedingly. He had even dined at Stalmine Hall, for, although Sir Godfrey Stalmine still looked on the retired manufacturer's

son as a good deal beneath him, the squire of Deepdene had dished the Whitebrook Whigs, and the old Tory baronet would probably not have hesitated to invite our ghostly foe himself to dinner if his satanic majesty had wrested an equally important seat from the hated Liberals.

Another source of satisfaction was the approaching marriage of Dora with "that Russian fellow," as Mr. Ryvington occasionally described his future brother-in-law. His cousin had behaved very well in the affair, he told Tom Cliviger. Old Pleasington, and Yardley, and Mrs. Ryvington were a good deal against the match at first, but Red Randle had brought them all round, and the engagement had received the approval of the trustees and of every member of the two families.

Red Randle had written about Kalougia to Count Dimitri Dragamanoffsky, one of the *attachés* of the Russian embassy in London (Dora was mistaken in supposing that her lover intended to name the ambassador himself as his reference), and received a reply in every way satisfactory. Sergius Kalougia, the Count said, was a man of honour, and belonged to an honourable family. As to the value of his property, the Count, not having been lately in Russia, was unable to give precise information; but on this point, as on all others that concerned him, Sergius Kalougia's representations might be implicitly trusted. The only thing he knew against Sergius Kalougia was his revolutionary opinions; but as he was now an exile, and had given his word not to meddle with politics during the Czar's pleasure, and as the Count understood that Mr. Randle Ryvington was fully acquainted with Sergius Kalougia's Socialistic sentiments, the Count did not deem it his duty to make any further reference thereto; and he begged his correspondent to accept the assurance of his distinguished consideration.

When Randle, on Dora's behalf, mentioned the engagement to his co-trustees, they received the news with decided disfavour. Mr. Pleasington seemed greatly annoyed. He said that, if Miss Ryvington was resolved not to marry an English nobleman, she might at least marry an English gentleman; and he declared, with an old-fashioned oath, that nothing should ever induce him to consent to her marriage with a beggarly foreigner.

"Them's exactly my sentiments also," said Yardley, who thereupon asked Randle if it was not the habit of Russian gentlemen to clout (he meant knout) their wives every Saturday night, and received his assurance to the contrary with a smile of complete incredulity.

But when Randle pointed out to his friends that, seeing Dora would so soon be of age, it made very little difference to her whether they gave their consent or not, and produced the

attaché's letter, they saw the matter in quite another light. The letter, written on a big sheet of foolscap, bearing the Russian Imperial eagle at the top and the Count's wonderful signature at the bottom, made a great impression.

"I regard this as a highly satisfactory communication," observed the lawyer, as he handed the letter to Yardley. "Mr. Kalongia is evidently a gentleman, although he is a foreigner."

"He mun [must] be a mon of importance," said Yardley, as he vainly tried to spell the Count's signature. "What do you call him?"

"Sergius—Mr. Sergius Kalongia," answered Mr. Pleasington, rather surprised at the question.

"I don't mean him. I mean this t'other. Timothy Drago-monoffsdonky, I read it."

"It is nearly as bad. Count Dimitri Dragamanoffsky is the gentleman's name."

"Bi' th' mon, it is waur," said Yardley, with a laugh. "I don't wonder at there being Nihilists, or owt else, in a country where they have such names as that."

As touching money, Randle informed his co-trustees that Kalongia not only desired, but insisted, that every shilling of Dora's fortune, present and to come, should be strictly tied up and settled on her for her own separate use.

Legal business is always satisfactory to lawyers, though not always to their clients, and the prospect of drawing Dora's marriage settlements restored to Mr. Pleasington all his wonted good humour. He expressed the opinion, moreover, that, everything considered, Dora might perhaps do worse, especially as Randle was able to assure him that Kalongia, though not a rich man, had a fair estate.

It would have been more, the latter said, if he had not spent so much money in "the cause," and a great deal less, probably, if his long imprisonment and subsequent exile had not constrained him to an involuntary economy.

As Kalongia could not go back to Russia, and did not want to go anywhere else, it was arranged that he and Dora should live at Redscar Hall, where Dora was born. So everything was settled to everybody's satisfaction, not excepting Mrs. Ryvington, who, on receiving her niece's assurance that Sergius had agreed to attend with her regularly the means of grace, gave Dora a kiss and expressed a hope that their union might be blessed.

All was going so well with Deep Randle, indeed, that he began to think nothing would ever go wrong with him; and he had cause for further contentment in the fact that he had lately made an acquaintance which he believed would eventually lead to the full consummation of his hopes. True, he had not

yet ventured to "pop the question;" but in less than a week Parliament would meet, his sojourn in London could not fail to give him opportunities for the prosecution of his suit which he at present lacked, and he made no doubt that, before the end of the session, he should be the husband of a "lady" and the sole owner of Deepdene.

Thus ran Mr. Ryvington's waking dream as he lay in bed one morning a month or two before the time fixed for his sister's marriage. Yet though his prospects were so bright, and his thoughts so pleasant, Deep Randle was ill at ease. His head ached, and he was suffering from that moral and physical nausea with which Nature punishes over-indulgence at the table. The evening before he had dined at Tom Cliviger's with a party of bachelors, composed chiefly of his political supporters. There had been heavy drinking, as there generally was at the yarn agent's parties; the new M.P., as he generally did, had taken "kindly to his liquor," and the counting of his unhatched chickens and his reflections anent his matrimonial schemes, were interspersed with mental, and sometimes audible, cursings of his host for having pressed him to drink, and his own folly for yielding to his host's seductions.

At length, daylight having appeared, Mr. Ryvington rang his bell and ordered his man to bring a brandy and soda. It would "pull him together," he thought. The dose having had the desired effect, he asked for tea and the papers.

But he was in an essentially bad humour, and if the editor of the sheet he first glanced at could have heard his comments thereon, he would not have felt particularly flattered.

"The duty of members of the House of Commons in the approaching parliamentary session," he muttered. "What conceited beggars these newspaper writers are! Why, this fellow talks as if he were wiser than Queen, Lords, and Commons all put together! 'We, we, we!' Confound him and his wees. I should like to shove his wretched paper down his miserable throat. And even his news is worth nothing. 'Another child murder.' Who cares about children being murdered? Let 'em be murdered. 'Murderous outrage in Ireland.' That is no news. It would be news worth telling, now, if there had been no outrage. 'Sir Hooker Poker, M.P., and Mr. Merrygoround, M.P., on the state of the country.' Stupid fools! what do they know about the state of the country? And a nice lot of rot they seem to have been talking too. But they will never be M.P.'s again—at least not for the county—sure to get turned out at the next election, Sharp says. Gad, I never saw a paper with less news in all my life, and the little there is is the merest fribble. Hallo, what's this?" And Deep Randle jumped out of bed suddenly as

if a small earthquake had propelled him therefrom, and, dancing wildly round the room, uttered imprecations both loud and deep. Then he looked at the newspaper a second time, and after convincing himself that there was really no mistake about it, that it was only too true, he took another sip of brandy, this time to steady his nerves, and proceeded as fast as possible to dress himself.

The news in this newsless journal which had thrown Mr. Ryvington into so violent agitation was an announcement that the Prime Minister had decided, for reasons best known to himself, on an immediate dissolution of Parliament. The writs were to be out in a few days, and the elections would probably begin the following week.

It was certainly rather rough on Deep Randle to be so summarily deprived of an honour he had enjoyed so short a time and bought at so high a price—to be turned out of Parliament before he had seen the inside of the House of Commons. There were other considerations, too, which caused him serious disquiet, and he reached Mr. Cliviger's office boiling over with rage and sick with disappointment.

The yarn agent calmed his excitement by telling him that there would be no contest; that he might count with the fullest confidence on a walk over.

"The Liberals won't fight," he said. "We gave them such a drubbing the other day that they won't toe the scratch again in a hurry. I'll lay three to one they don't. Besides, they haven't a man worth a straw. They'll have nothing more to do with old Hopps; they've had enough of him already. There's nobody else in the borough that'll stand, whom they could run with any hope of success; and as for a stranger, why, if an angel from heaven were to offer himself, and he was not a ratepayer, Whitebrook wouldn't have him. Keep up your pecker" (slapping Mr. Ryvington on the back, to that gentleman's great disgust). "It's only a bit more speech-making—the old address will do—and canvassing, and Richard will be himself again."

"How much?" asked the ex-M.P., whose spirits this harangue did not seem much to raise.

"Oh, a mere trifle. Five hundred ought to do it this time, I think."

"That will make my seat have cost me exactly at the rate of £1,000 a month for the time I have held it," groaned the late member. "You may say what you like, Tom, I call it a dashed hard case."

In the after-part of the same day a hastily convened meeting of the leading Liberals of the town was held at the "Rainbow," to consider whether or not they should attempt to win back the

seat they had so lately lost. Though they were not so downcast as Cliviger supposed, there was no question of running two candidates. But there was a strong feeling that, with a really good man, they had a very fair chance of returning one. A name was mentioned which met with general approval. But could the owner of the name be prevailed on to stand? That was the question. The doubt could only be solved, as Twister put it, by "axing," and a deputation was named to wait forthwith on this "really good man," and ask him, if necessary entreat him, to step into the breach and lead the Liberal forlorn hope.

CHAPTER XLVI.

RED RYVINGTON IS "AXED."

RED RYVINGTON was in his private office discussing with his head mechanic, Jim Filings, the details of a scheme he had determined to put into immediate operation for warming by steam a row of cottages, situated near the factory, and by enabling their occupants to dispense, wholly or partly, with fires, effect an important economy in their consumption of coal. Pipes, connected with one of the boilers, were to be laid in the dwellings in question, and arranged in such fashion that they would not only efficiently heat them, but boil water and perform all ordinary cooking operations—do everything culinary, in fact, save brown meat and toast bread. If the plan proved a success, Randle meant to apply it to all the cottages owned by the concern.

"I'm nobbut feared as some on 'em will be blowing theirselves up," observed Jim Filings, after he had received his master's instructions; "they're terrible goamless [stupid] about pipes and valves and cocks, and such like, some folks is—specially women."

"Nonsense, Jim! How can they blow themselves up? The apparatus will be almost self-acting, and safer than either gas or the closed kitchen boilers, which so often burst in frosty weather."

"It will be a great boon to your workpeople," said Kalougia, who was present, and took much interest in the scheme, "and no great cost to you."

"No, it will not involve any great outlay, and I do not think it will run away with very much steam, that, however, remains to be seen. But you are mistaken if you suppose I mean to make the tenants a present of all this, for I intend to make an addition to the rent of the cottages, sufficient to give us a fair interest on

our outlay and cover the cost of steam. Don't you see that it is to the advantage of the hands themselves that we should do so?"

"Not exactly. It seems to me that you are going to deprive the boon of much of its value."

"Not at all. I don't look upon it as a boon, if by that you mean a gift. People prize a thing all the more if they pay for it, and I want to encourage others to adopt the same system, if it answers, by making a commercial success of it. Philanthropy is a very fine motive, but a safe 5 per cent. tells more with common folks; and we must take the world as we find it, Mr. Kalougia. As for the hands, unless I am greatly out in my calculations, the balance of advantage will be very much in their favour. Even supposing the steam and interest on outlay cost them as much as coal would cost them—and I am sure they will not—they will be gainers. Have you ever thought of the trouble and misery of kindling a kitchen fire (and the kitchen is where workpeople live, remember) on a cold winter's morning? Even at the best it takes a good hour to get the place well warmed; and if a woman wants to prepare a cup of coffee for a husband who has to be at his work at six o'clock, she must be down at five at the latest. But with the plan I propose, the house will be warm night and day; and in five minutes after going downstairs a housewife may have the family breakfast on the table. It will lighten the labour of a working-class household by one half, and make home pleasanter for all. I have more faith in schemes of this sort for rendering life easier for the multitude than in most social and political remedies of the heroic sort—though, so far as sweeping abuses away, you will find few more ardent reformers than I am. That reminds me of the election. You have been to Whitebrook this afternoon, Kalougia. Did you hear what they are going to do there? Is my cousin going to stand again? I can imagine the rage he will be in. And it is rather hard for a fellow to be turned out of his seat before he has had time to get warm in it."

At this moment Bob came in, looking very much excited.

"I say, Ran, here's a lot of people wanting to see you—such a lot."

"A deputation from the hands, I suppose. What's wrong?"

"No, a deputation from Whitebrook. Twister, Stubbins, Striver, old and young Hopps, and a dozen or two more."

"God bless me—what on earth! But ask them to come in, Bob. I must not keep them waiting."

Whereupon the door was thrown open, and in marched a deputation, of dimensions so portentous that Randle had to retreat before it until he was literally driven into a corner.

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure, gentlemen," he said, with a puzzled look, when the crowd had filed into the room. "If you had only given me a little notice of your coming, I would have provided a few more seats."

"Never mind about offering us seats," replied Twister. "We have come to offer you one."

"You have come to offer me a seat?" returned Red Ryvington, who now for the first time began to divine his visitors' object.

"Yes," answered Twister, who was so much in earnest that he actually forgot for a minute or two to express himself in his native Doric, "to offer you a seat in Parliament—to make a Hem P. of you. We want you to stand for Whitebrook in the Liberal interest. We think you are better qualified for the position than anybody else in our town, and that, if you will come out, you are sure to get in."

"No, no; I cannot let you say that, Mr. Twister," said Randle, deprecatingly; "there are several others who are decidedly better qualified than I am."

"I don't think that is a point we need discuss, Mr. Ryvington," put in the elder Hopps, who was by no means of Twister's opinion as to Randle's being the best qualified man in the borough. "It is not altogether a question of claims or qualifications. It is a question as to whom we can run with the best chance of success. Nobody but you has the slightest chance of success; and if you will not consent to stand we shall be obliged to let the Tory candidates have a walk over."

"But really, gentlemen," pleaded Randle, "I have no ambition for parliamentary honours. My work lies here. I am fully occupied, and I do honestly believe that I can do more good in Whitebrook than in London. I am very, very much obliged to you, gentlemen. To be chosen by the Liberal party as a candidate is a distinction I never expected; but I am afraid I must decline. Yes, I must decline."

"No, no, no," cried a dozen voices, "we will not let you decline. Mr. Ryvington, you must stand."

"Don't come to an 'asty decision, Mr. Ryvington; don't come to an 'asty decision," said Stubbins, speaking for the first time.

"I can quite understand your feelings, Mr. Randle," observed Twister, sympathetically. "When I'm in London, I always feel as if I was in foreign parts, like. It isn't a bit like home, and them Londoners' twang I never could abide—it isn't gradely English; while as for the fine buildings they talk so much about—the Parliament House and Buckingham Palace, and such like—why, I'd liefer see a new thirty-bay factory with a big chimney than all on 'em put together. But it's sometimes

a mon's duty to make a sacrifice for a cause; folks has deed afore now for their principles — martyrs and that mak [sort] o' chaps, you know. You are a Liberal, aren't you?"

Randle admitted the soft impeachment.

"Well, then, if you willn't come out, Liberal principles will suffer, for Whitebrook will be represented by two Tories—gradely owd runk [rank] 'uns, too, though one of them is your namesake, and you willn't have done your duty. That's the way I put it. But think it over, Mr. Randle, think it over for an hour or two, and meet us to-neet, if you'll be so kind, at the 'Dancing Billy Goat' in Toad Lane. Th' working men voters don't like to come to the 'Rainbow'—they say it's too fine for 'em."

"Certainly, Twister, that is the least I can do after the trouble you have taken in coming all the way here to see me," said Randle, grasping eagerly at the proffered respite, for he wanted leisure to reflect, "What time?"

"Say nine o'clock."

"Good. I will be at the 'Dancing Billy Goat' at nine o'clock."

"Well!" exclaimed Randle, turning to his brother and Kalougia, after he had shaken hands with every member of the deputation, and the last of them had taken his departure.

"Oh, Ran, you will stand, won't you?" said Bob, eagerly. "It is true what Twister says. There is no one in Whitebrook that will make half so good a member as you. And, whether you know it or not, you are the most popular man in the town. Ever since we refused to join in the lock-out, the hands have sworn by you."

"Your opinion is too flattering to be true, I'm afraid, Bob," said Randle, smiling at the young fellow's impetuosity. "What do you think about it, Kalougia?"

"You must accept this invitation, my friend," replied the Russian, earnestly, laying his hand on Randle's shoulder. "I think, if I were an Englishman, I should never be content until I was a member of the House of Commons. It has its faults, but it has a grand history, and it is the oldest and most illustrious legislative assembly in the world. Belong to it. You have ideas, and you are honest. The House needs more men of your stamp."

"Is honesty, then, so rare a quality in the most illustrious legislative assembly in the world?" said Randle, with a smile.

"I mean honesty of opinion, courage to speak as you think, without fear or favour, neither minding whether it vexes your party or pleases your constituents."

"Tell the truth and shame the devil, you mean. Well. I

suppose it's every man's duty to do that, whether he is in Parliament or not. But as for speaking—well, there's only too much of that, both in the House and out of it. I should like to see less talk and more work. I think I am better here, Kalongia; and I have the interests of the concern to consider, you know. I don't quite see my way yet; but I must make up my mind, I suppose, before nine to-night."

Before going to the "Dancing Billy Goat," Randle told his mother what had come to pass, and asked her advice.

"Well," said Mrs. Ryvington, rubbing her spectacles, and making a vain effort to hide the satisfaction which the news of her son's having been asked to stand for Whitebrook gave her, "it has been several times borne on my mind that, if a Ryvington was to be member for Whitebrook, it should be you, Randle. You are far better qualified than your cousin. And this deputation, and you being the only person in the borough, as they say, that is likely to succeed, seems to me almost like a leading of Providence."

"But the business, mother; you forget the business. You know what my father used to say, 'The concern must not suffer.' Now I fear that if I go away it will suffer; and I gave him my word always to stand by it, you know."

"I know you did, my dear lad; and that promise was a great comfort to him on his death-bed. But if it should so be that you are elected I hope the Lord, who has done so much for us, will not let it be any detriment to the concern. And Robert is coming on to be very useful, and you could get somebody to help him. Besides, you would not always be in London, you know. You could run down here two or three times a month in the session; and you would not have to be in London more than six or seven months in the year altogether."

Yet Randle could not make up his mind. Never in all his life before had he been in so painful a state of indecision. His present pursuits suited him. He liked the active duties of his position as head of a large business; and he took so much interest in the various schemes he had in hand that to give them up, or confide their execution to others, would be positively painful to him. He feared, too, that the concern might suffer, in the event of his being returned, by his frequent absences; and he held the fulfilment of his promise to his father to maintain intact the ancient reputation of the firm as a sacred duty. On the other hand, he was far from being insensible to the high compliment involved in the invitation to offer himself as a candidate for the borough, of the honour a seat in Parliament would confer on the family, and the chances of usefulness it would throw in his way.

Nevertheless, Randle could not make up his mind, and when he and Robert and Kalongia, who accompanied him, arrived at the "Dancing Billy Goat," none of them knew what would be his answer.

CHAPTER XLVII.

RED RYVINGTON'S ANSWER.

THE "Dancing Billy Goat" was one of the oldest houses in one of the oldest streets of Whitebrook. Once upon a time it had been a highly-renowned inn, much frequented by the gentry of the neighbourhood; but it had long ago fallen from its high estate, and was now frequented chiefly by working folks and small tradesmen. The apartment in which the flower of the Liberal party had assembled to hear Randle's answer was the club-room of the "Ancient Codgers," a secret benefit society, whose gay banners and glittering insignia, hanging on the walls, were in striking contrast with the bare floor and scanty furniture, and gave the place a quaint and unusual aspect.

The room was quite full. The greater part of those present were working men, among whom Randle and Robert recognised several of their own hands.

"Well, Mr. Ryvington," said Twister, when the cheering which greeted the former's appearance had subsided, "I hope you have brought us good news—as you've made up your mind to step into th' breach and lead us on to victory."

"That's reyt, Mester Twister," cried a voice. "Bi' th' mon, he talks like a book."

"How can he miss? He's a heyd like a hoss's. Give Mester Twister a cheer, lads."

"No more of that just now, if yo please; we have come to hear Mr. Ryvington's answer, not to shout," exclaimed Twister, who did not seem altogether to relish the reference to the somewhat equine proportions of his skull. Now, Mr. Ryvington."

"I am afraid, gentlemen, I cannot give the answer you desire. I have thought the matter over, and it seems to me that I can do more good in a private capacity here than in a public capacity in London. And there are reasons, reasons of a kind personal to myself, which would render it inexpedient for me to accept the honourable position which you have so unexpectedly offered me. Surely there are others who would have an equal chance of success. I could name several gentlemen, any one of whom would, I am sure, be proud to come forward."

On this a young man with a high forehead and pale, intellectual features, the appearance of whose trousers, rubbed smooth in front by frequent contact with the cloth beam of his loom, showed that he followed the calling of weaver, stood up and asked permission to say a few words.

He spoke with force and fluency, and though his accent was broad his English was unexceptionable. Bentley, in fact, was a very fair scholar, and had contributed to the local press several poems of more than average merit.

Mr. Ryvington's suggestion, he observed, that they should select some other candidate was quite out of the question. A candidate could not be made to order, like a pair of clogs or a piece of shirting, and there was no other man in that town than Mr. Ryvington that he and his mates would strip off their jackets to work for. Even before Mr. Ryvington had endeared himself to the working classes by his noble conduct in striking against the lock-out, he was well known and much liked. They knew him as a master who dealt justly with those that worked for him, and was consistently solicitous for their welfare; and altogether, irrespective of politics, Bentley believed that the majority of the Whitebrook work-folks would liefer be represented by Mr. Ryvington than by one of their own order. They could trust him—that was the main thing. They trusted him so much that, even if he differed in opinion from them on any question that might arise, they would rather take his judgment than their own. They felt that he sympathised with them, and knew what would be good for them better than they knew themselves. He could answer for his mates; they had asked him to be their spokesman, and on their behalf he begged of Mr. Ryvington to go to the House of Commons (for if he consented to stand they would pledge themselves to return him) and do what he could for the working classes—for all classes, in fact—of his native town.

Bentley's speech elicited round after round of applause, and was followed by such a manifestation of sympathy from all present that Randle felt he could resist no longer, and being for the moment at a loss for words in which to express himself, he was fain to signify his assent by a nod.

A long conversation then ensued touching the business of the election, the organisation of ward committees, the appointment of ward canvassers, and other details. At Randle's instance, Bentley was appointed vice-chairman of the general committee, the chairman being Mr. Striver, an extensive manufacturer and old Redscar hand.

In reply to a question from Twister, Randle declared his intention of writing his address before he went home. The

Rubicon being passed, he threw himself into the contest with as much energy as if it had been an invention for weaving by lightning, or a scheme for making stalwart idlers do a fair share of the world's work.

Before his friends separated, Randle made a short speech.

"Now, lads," he began—"I beg your pardon—gentlemen."

"No, no, let it be lads; lads is best," shouted several of the audience.

"That would not be respectful to many who are present," continued the candidate, with a smile; "but as I must now, as far as possible, be all things to all men, I will try to meet your views by saying 'lads and gentlemen.' I am very wishful that the contest in which we have decided to engage should be conducted honourably—straightforwardly as touching ourselves, and kindly as touching our opponents. The only difference between them and us is a difference of opinion as to what is best for the country. Meet argument with argument by all means, but mere abuse will win us neither votes nor credit. I come of a Conservative stock myself, some of my best friends belong to the opposite camp, and, although I believe their views to be mischievous, I give them credit for the same sincerity of purpose as I claim for myself. Another thing. I want no man to be pressed to vote for me. If, after reading my address, and hearing what I have to say, and being respectfully asked for his vote, an elector does not seem disposed to give us his support, let him alone. I am sure nobody here would attempt to obtain votes by unfair means—by either direct or constructive bribery or intimidation. But if any person should be contemplating anything of the sort, it is well for him to know that he would not only be committing a penal offence, but that his breach of the law would fail of its intended purpose. For on the fact coming to my knowledge I should resign my seat. I would never submit to the dishonour of being turned out by an election commission. That is all, I think, except that I want to thank you again for having invited me to become your candidate, to assure you that, now the die is cast, no effort on my part shall be wanting to justify your confidence and secure you the victory."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE TUG OF WAR.

GREAT was the consternation in the Conservative camp, and deep the dismay of Deep Randle and Tom Cliviger, when they heard of the meeting at the "Dancing Billy Goat" and that Red Randle had been adopted as the Liberal candidate. The blow was all the greater in that it was altogether unexpected. Ryvington of Redscar was so seemingly devoted to his business, and had hitherto taken so little part in politics, that neither his cousin nor his cousin's supporters had counted on him as a possible opponent. His appearance in the field, backed by the working men interest, was an event which rendered Cliviger's ingenious system of computing the relative strength of parties by the extent of their engine power utterly useless. Nobody knew now which way the election would go. It was generally thought that the battle would be between the two Ryvingtons. The senior member, Mr. Mellodew, a retired manufacturer of large means and Conservative opinions, who had lately bloomed into a Cheshire squire, had sat for the borough so long, had done so much for the local charities, and was so popular and respected withal, that neither he nor his friends had the slightest doubt of his return at the head of the poll.

Still, as the yarn agent sagaciously suggested to Deep Randle, there was no telling; and the very confidence at the Mellodew Committee (for, though wishing Mr. Ryvington every success, they declined to act with him) might militate against their success. Three-cornered contests were proverbially fertile in surprises. Very curious changes might be rung on plumpers for Red Ryvington, and splits between him and Mellodew, and between Mellodew and Deep Ryvington. Many of the former's supporters, under the belief so industriously spread by his committee that he was sure of a majority, would give their second votes to one of the other candidates—in some cases, probably, split between the two Randles—for in times of excitement there was no end to the vagaries of Whitebrook electors.

"I think the measures I am taking," said Cliviger, with a significant wink, "will get you in anyhow—whoever the other is—and in my opinion, though it would not do to say so to Bellasis and that lot, it's quite on the cards for you and your cousin to get in and old Mellodew to be left out in the cold."

"May the devil fly away with my cousin," exclaimed Deep Randle, furiously. "What business has he to offer himself, I should like to know, in opposition to the head of the family? It's

a piece of infernal impudence—impudence and ingratitude—for if my father had not retired from the concern, Red Ryvington would not have been what he is. My father made him, in fact, and now he is turning against me. He's a dashed turncoat, too; wasn't he brought up as a Conservative? Damme, if his present conduct is not enough to make both his father and mine rise from their graves. I'll never speak to the sneak again—never as long as his heart beats. I'll cut him dead the next time I meet him, by Jove!"

"I wouldn't advise you to do that, Ryvington, at least before the election. Ride on his back, rather."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you twig? Your cousin is very popular with the hands; they swear by him. If you cut up rough and show unfriendly, you will repel votes instead of attracting them. You must go on the opposite tack. Let it be supposed that you are on the most amicable terms possible, that you wish him well, and that the difference between you is only one of detail. Trim between his Radicalism and old Mellodew's Toryism; pose as a Liberal Conservative, in fact, and then you will get splits from the supporters of both. You want to get in, don't you, whatever becomes of the others?"

"Oh, yes! dash the others!"

"Exactly. Then you must do as I tell you. If you don't you will cut your own throat. After the election you can do what you dashed like. At the same time, I don't much believe in making enemies unnecessarily, or showing a grudge before you can gratify it. It's like showing your hand at cards. Bide your time and keep your own counsel—that's my advice."

Deep Randle's vexation at the turn things were taking was enhanced by the necessity under which he found himself of spending a great deal more money than he had expected. Cliviger declared, that unless he spent at least £2,500, he would not have a ghost of a chance; and Mr. Ryvington, not having that sum at his disposal, it was raised, as the cost of his first contest had been raised, by discounting their joint promissory note at the bank. He was fully aware, though the yarn agent had carefully avoided telling him in so many words, of the purpose for which the greater part of this sum was destined, and the consciousness that his retention of the seat, even if he should win it, would depend on Cliviger's goodwill and pleasure, did not tend to put him in a better humour, or make his thoughts any the pleasanter. But it was too late to draw back. The liabilities he had incurred, both in connection with his election and otherwise, rendered it absolutely necessary for him to get the estate entirely into his own hands by marrying in accordance

with the terms of his father's will, and this, he opined, could be most easily and quickly done by regaining the position of which he had been so summarily deprived.

It goes without saying that he followed Cliviger's advice to keep on a friendly footing with his cousin. Mr. Ryvington was far too astute a gentleman to cut off his nose to spite his face. He even bettered his mentor's instructions. People who observed the cordiality with which the cousins greeted each other in the market-place, and whenever they met, thought them the best friends in the world. Deep Randle even went the length of saying that, if Red Randle had not been quite so much of a Radical, he would have retired in his favour, so great was his respect for him. This saying was repeated at the Liberal headquarters, where it made an excellent impression, being regarded as a proof of the Conservative candidate's goodwill, and of his affection for the Redscar branch of the family, and doubtless gained him many split votes that would otherwise have been given to Mr. Mellodew. It seemed to ardent Liberals that the next best thing to getting their own man in was to keep the senior candidate out, an object that could most surely be effected by recording their second vote in favour of him of Deepdene. This policy, moreover, was tacitly encouraged, if not openly sanctioned, by the Liberal managers; for they regarded Mellodew as a much more formidable opponent than his colleague.

Meanwhile Red Randle was throwing himself into the work of the election with characteristic energy. Now that his blood was up, he took a positive pleasure in the contest, and, as he had promised his supporters, spared no effort to deserve success. He made five or six speeches every day, answered innumerable questions, and, albeit, he absolutely refused to solicit individual votes, he was always willing to explain his views to any elector who sought an interview with him.

Although Randle had not taken a leading part in previous elections, he had reflected deeply on social and political questions, and it is probable that his views on these subjects may, unconsciously to himself, have been influenced by his conversations with Kalougia. He had a keen sense of the disadvantages under which the poorer classes labour in the struggle for existence—how hard are their lives, how few and sordid their pleasures; and whilst deprecating violent remedies, as likely to be worse than the disease, he promised to advocate and support every measure likely to ameliorate the lot of the poor, and obviate the evils resulting from a too unequal distribution of wealth. He denounced as grossly unjust the imprisonment of poor debtors, under the pretext that non-compliance with a judicial order to pay constitutes a contempt of court, while larger debtors are

exposed to no analogous liability. In reply to a tradesman who contended that, in the event of this law being abolished, shopkeepers would be constrained either to shorten, or altogether withdraw, the credit they were in the habit of giving to their humbler customers, Randle replied that the less credit the working class, or any other class, had, the better. Ready money meant thrift, credit bred extravagance, and extravagance led to impoverishment. One of his ideas was the establishment of schools for the superior education of poor lads of proved ability at the public expense, so that they might have an equal chance with the well-to-do of competing for higher appointments in the Civil Service, and making themselves otherwise useful to the community. In none of his speeches, however, did Randle commit the fault of flattering his audiences. He told them plainly that laws could do little for them compared with what they could do for themselves.

"You cannot make a man better his condition," he said; "you can only show him the way and give him a chance."

He did not say much about the organisation of labour, for he knew that anything of the sort, to be effective, must be a spontaneous growth, and that the less the State interfered with it the better. He knew, too, the difficulties of co-operative production, the so-called co-operative mills at Oldham and elsewhere being merely joint-stock companies, in which the factory operatives may or may not hold a considerable number of shares. The system in question is, nevertheless, a great step in advance. It encourages thrift, and enables every operative who has sufficient self-denial to save a few pounds to participate in the profits he helps to create.

One of Randle's most potent allies was Bentley the weaver. He went with him to all his meetings. After Red Ryvington had been heard there were always loud calls for Bill Bentley. The man was naturally eloquent. He possessed a shrewd and caustic humour which never failed to delight his auditors, and the working men among them were proud of him as one of their own order. If Bentley had been gifted with a talent for money-making ("coal-rake sense," as they call it in Lancashire) he might have got on, have become a successful shopkeeper, or even a master manufacturer. As it was, he remained a four-loom weaver.

Bentley's case was frequently adduced by Randle in support of his proposal that lads of exceptional ability and inadequate means should be educated at the expense of the State. He said that, so far as natural capacity went, the weaver was far fitter to represent Whitebrook than himself.

As the time of trial drew near, the excitement in the town

became intense. The partisans of the three candidates strove might and main to win the day. Although the country at large was in the throes of a general election, the singular character of the contest at Whitebrook attracted to it a more than local interest, and its issue was awaited with keen expectation.

On the day of the nomination Deep Randle had a great stroke of luck. His greyhound Fleetfoot won the Trafalgar Cup—an event which, in any circumstances, would have been highly gratifying to him; but he had backed the dog heavily to win, and its victory, being considered a credit to the town, brought him a considerable accession of popularity, put money in his pocket, and increased his chances of success at the same time. How he blessed that greyhound! Tom Cliviger reckoned that Fleetfoot's "pulling off the cup" was equal to a hundred votes, and he had now good hopes, he said, that, whoever might be at the head of the poll, Mr. Ryvington would not be at the bottom.

The event justified his anticipations. When the ballots were counted it was found that, although Deep Ryvington was nearly a thousand votes behind his cousin, he was exactly five ahead of Mr. Mellodew.

"We've won!" exclaimed the yarn agent, when the result was announced; "but, by Jingo, it was a tight shave. If I had not—. But never mind. We have nothing to fear from the Liberals; they have won too; and the Conservatives won't foul their own nest by lodging a petition against us. You must be as affable as an angel with a new pair of wings to the Mellodew lot, Ryvington."

Past midnight though it was, each of the newly-elected had to make a speech. The Conservative member made his from the balcony of the "Mitre"; while the Liberal M.P., as in duty bound, spoke from the steps of the "Rainbow." As Deep Randle had been engaged at intervals during the day in allaying the agony of suspense and keeping up his courage by numerous libations of sherry and champagne, his remarks were slightly incoherent; but he was understood to tender his warmest thanks to his supporters for the honour they had conferred upon him, and to say that the only alloy to his satisfaction in that, the proudest moment of his life, was that they had not returned Mr. Mellodew to keep him company in the House of Commons.

Red Randle, after ascribing his success chiefly to the exertions of working-men voters, recommended his supporters, while rejoicing in their victory, to abstain from unseemly exultation, to let bygones be bygones, and not to suffer political differences to interfere with private friendships. Mr. Mellodew, Conservative though he was, merited their warmest sympathy. He had been a generous benefactor to the borough, had represented

Whitebrook in four Parliaments; and he stood so high in the opinion of his fellow-townsmen that even those who differed from him regretted his defeat—a defeat which in some quarters was attributed to very questionable causes. With that, however, conscious as they were that they had fought fairly, they had nothing to do; but he would ask his friends before they separated to testify their respect for Mr. Mellodew as a man, and their sense of his services to Whitebrook, by giving him three cheers.

The three cheers, followed by three times three for Randle himself, were given with great heartiness and, if compliments could weigh against failure, the unsuccessful candidate would have had no reason to be dissatisfied with his defeat.

Whatever may have been the case with the Conservatives, the Liberals went home in high good humour, and the lads in clogs behaved with exemplary moderation—they neither kicked each other's shins nor broke other people's windows.

It was early morning when Randle, Robert, and Kalougia, who had been watching the election with eager interest, arrived at Redscar, but Mrs. Ryvington and Dora were waiting up for them, eager to learn the result of the contest. Dora was delighted beyond measure to learn that the two Ryvingtons had been returned; and besides warmly congratulating the hero of the day, rewarded him with her brightest smile and a cousinly kiss. Mrs. Ryvington breathed a silent thanksgiving. On great occasions her thoughts were often too big for words.

Then Randle, worn out with excitement and fatigue, betook himself to bed and slept for twelve hours without once opening his eyes. He did not go down to the counting-house until late in the afternoon, where he found plenty to do in looking over the correspondence that had taken place while he was electioneering, and answering the most pressing of his letters. So absorbed did he become in his work that the electric bell at his elbow rang twice before he heard it.

"Yes," he said, speaking through the telephone which communicated with the general office and the principal departments of the business.

"A gentleman wishes to speak to you," came the answer.

"Show him up at once," answered Randle, thinking the gentleman might be his election agent, from whom he expected a call.

A minute afterwards the door opened, and Randle, raising his head, saw before him the Earl of Lindisfarne.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN EXPLANATION.

"GOD bless me!" exclaimed the new M.P., after a moment's startled pause. "You here, Lord Lindisfarne!" And then he requested, rather coldly, his guest to take a seat.

"You seem surprised to see me, Mr. Ryvington," said the earl; "and no wonder. I suppose you thought we had quite forgotten you. My presence here shows that we have not. I come to offer an apology and make an explanation—so far as I can explain. As to that, however, I think I shall have to ask you to help me out a little. You remember, when we parted at Brigue, I said that, on our return to England, I would write to you, and you gave me your card. Unfortunately, I either mislaid it at Brigue or lost it on the way to Zermatt. At any rate, though I sought high and low I could not find it, any more than I could remember either your Christian name or your place of abode, which, seeing that I put your card in my pocket without looking at it, is perhaps not very surprising. Thinking you might possibly have written your address in the visitors' book at Brigue or Viesch, I wrote for it to both these places, and from both received the same answer—that you were Monsieur Ryvington from England, an answer which, as you may suppose, did not help us much. It was thus impossible to communicate with you; and we were all greatly annoyed, especially Lady Muriel, who said you would deem us both ungrateful and sadly lacking in courtesy. We hoped, however, that we should either meet with you somewhere or hear of you. I thought, even, you might not improbably conjecture the cause of our silence and write to us.

"We made several inquiries in various quarters without result, and had almost given up hope, when we saw an account in the papers of the last Whitebrook election, and the return of a Mr. Randle Ryvington. As we had an idea, from an observation or two that you let drop when we were together, that you belonged to the North of England, it occurred to us that this gentleman might possibly be the Mr. Ryvington we knew and wanted to find, or, if not, he might put us in the way of finding him. So I wrote, explaining the circumstances and making the inquiry. I mentioned, too, how happy we should be (in the event of my surmise proving correct) to renew the acquaintance and see you at Avalon.

"I addressed my letter to Randle Ryvington, Esq., M.P. Whitebrook, Lancashire, and this is the letter" (handing it to Randle) "I received in reply."

The letter was dated "Deepdene Park." Every sentence of it had evidently been well weighed. It expressed the pleasure which the receipt of Lord Lindisfarne's letter afforded the writer, stated that the peer was quite right in his conjecture that the Randle Ryvington whom he had met in the Furca Pass and the newly-elected M.P. for Whitebrook were one and the same person, and concluded with the assurance that he would be delighted to renew the acquaintance and make a visit to Avalon Priory.

The letter was signed "Randle Ryvington."

"Well," said Randle, in a voice tremulous with anger, after he had read and re-read his cousin's treacherous missive, "I knew that Randle Ryvington of Deepdene was a cad, but I did not think he was capable of forgery and personation. But pray go on, Lord Lindisfarne. I will enlighten you as to my namesake's motives presently. Did this—did the individual who wrote this letter actually visit you at Avalon?"

"Yes; he stayed some three weeks with us, I think, and we were expecting him for a second visit before the meeting of Parliament. You will perhaps think that we were remiss in not detecting the imposture—that if we had used our eyes properly we should have perceived that he was not the real Simon Pure. But you are really so very much alike—though now I look at you I can see many decided points of difference—and when you have only met a man once you may easily, after a lapse of nearly two years, confound him with somebody else. In truth the idea of imposition never occurred to us. Mr. Ryvington was a member of Parliament, a gentleman of family and position, and we knew no reason—I know no reason yet—why he should seek to pass himself off as somebody else. When I say 'us,' I should, however, exclude my daughter Muriel. Not that she set him down as an impostor, but after he had been with us a few days she began, in spite of herself, to distrust him—to be haunted with a vague suspicion that he was not sincere. He seemed rather to avoid her, too, and this, seeing the circumstances under which they first met, somewhat surprised both Lady Lindisfarne and Lady Mary. For my own part, I must confess that I observed nothing of this. I only remarked that Ryvington did not improve on further acquaintance—that he was not so nice a fellow as I had at first taken him to be. Yet, now I think of it, there was one circumstance which, if the possibility of imposition had ever occurred to me, might well have confirmed my suspicions. He of course knew about the incidents in the Furca Pass, yet he never seemed to like talking about them—looked embarrassed when they were mentioned, and appeared anxious to change the subject. Still there was nothing inexplicable in this. It might arise from shyness, or from distaste to hear himself talked about.

"So far as it depended on me, indeed, and I may add on Lady Lindisfarne, your cousin might have gone on deceiving us for his own inscrutable purpose as long as he pleased. Lady Muriel was the first to suggest that he was other than he seemed; but though, as I have already said, she had conceived a mistrust of him almost from the first, it was only the other day that we were made aware of the fact, and of its why and wherefore.

"We have been spending part of the winter in Paris. We were in Paris when the Premier issued his fiat, like a bolt from the blue, for the dissolution of Parliament. We naturally took an interest in the Whitebrook election, and commiserated the hard fortune of Mr. Ryvington in being compelled to undergo two contests in the course of a few months. When I observed the names of two Randle Ryvingtons in the list of candidates I thought there was some mistake, that our friend's name had been accidentally printed twice, and I pointed it out to the countess and my daughters. But, as both names were repeated in the papers on the following day, this explanation did not long hold water, and I was expressing my surprise at so strange a coincidence, when Lady Muriel, to whom I had just passed the *Times*, startled us by exclaiming, 'There is a mystery; I am sure of it. Listen.'

"And then she read a paragraph commenting on the singular character of the contest at Whitebrook, and that the opposing candidates were cousins and namesakes. It was further stated that they bore a striking outward resemblance to each other, and that the people in the neighbourhood were in the habit of calling one 'Deep' and the other 'Red' Ryvington.

"Then Muriel told us of the doubts she had all along entertained concerning the *soi-disant* Mr. Ryvington's identity—doubts so vague, however, that she had hardly defined them even to herself much less mentioned them to us. She felt, she said, he was a man of altogether different character from that of the Mr. Ryvington who had saved her life in the Furca Pass. She was haunted at times by a suspicion that his features were not the same, and he more than once showed by his answers to her remarks that he was either imperfectly acquainted with some of the incidents that took place, either in the Pass or afterwards, or that he had forgotten them—in the circumstances a very unlikely supposition.

"Had this been all, I might have passed it by as the hallucination of a too romantic mind. But there were other circumstances that suggested a similar conclusion. Muriel said that the forefinger of our Mr. Ryvington's right hand was malformed, as if it had been some time severely crushed. It is so, is it not?"

"Yes," said Randle, holding up the finger in question. "I got it caught in one of the machines shortly after I left college."

"When she mentioned this fact," proceeded the earl, "I remembered it perfectly, although till then I had forgotten it, for I observed your finger when you were preparing the rope for your descent into the Rhone gorge. I had taken no notice of your namesake's fingers, but Mary and Muriel were agreed that the index finger of his right hand was as perfect as any of his other fingers. Then, though he talked a great deal about himself and his family, he never mentioned the fact of his having a cousin of the same name. The omission was significant."

"I suppose he equally avoided telling you anything about his father's will?"

"On the contrary, he seemed very frank on that score. I am not sure that he told us the truth, though. He said, among other things, that the family estates were strictly settled on himself, and that their net rental was about £15,000 a year. But to proceed. My suspicions were now so far awakened that I could not rest content without putting them to the test, and I did not require much pressing from Lady Muriel, who had taken the lead in the affair, to induce me to make a visit to Whitebrook and find out the truth. So on our way north I left the express at Preston and came on here. And now you know all, I think. But why on earth has your cousin been practising all this meanness and chicanery? That is what puzzles me. A man does not act as he has done for nothing. What——?"

"Oh, my cousin had plenty of motive," said Randle. And then he acquainted the peer with the provisions of his uncle's will, and the necessity under which Ryvington of Deepdene lay of marrying a lady of rank.

"Ah, I understand now!" exclaimed Lord Lindisfarne. "The gentleman was seeking a wife that he might gain a fortune. And, when I think of it, his attentions to my eldest daughter did become very marked shortly before he left us. I remember her mother once laughingly observing that she thought Mary had made a conquest of the member for Whitebrook."

"Suppose he had proposed to Lady Mary?" asked Randle, rather eagerly.

"In that case I cannot tell you what would have happened," laughed Lord Lindisfarne. "The question rather concerns Lady Mary and her mother. But it seems to me that your cousin, who, as you said a little while ago, must be a terrible cad, was a fool for his pains. A man in his position and with his expectations ought surely to be able to find a wife with all the qualification she wants without resorting to subterfuge and deceit. At least I should think so."

"There are some men who have a natural turn for deceit, Lord Lindisfarne. They prefer crooked ways to straight ones."

My cousin is unfortunately one of them. And the sooner he marries his lady, you know, the sooner he will make sure of his fortune and double his income."

"I hope he never will come into the property," exclaimed the earl, with much energy. "He does not deserve a penny of it. What shall you say to him?"

"I shall say very little," replied Randle, with a grim smile; "but I shall give him a good horse-whipping. I thrashed him when we were lads for playing me a shabby trick, and I shall thrash him again."

"Let me advise you not, Mr. Ryvington," returned the earl, earnestly. "I am an older man than you, and I never saw any good come of stirring up foul water. Don't, whatever you do, make a scandal. Leave your precious cousin to his reflections; they will not be very pleasant."

"I will take your advice, Lord Lindisfarne," said Randle, after a minute's thought; "not because I fear a scandal, but for the sake of my cousin Dora, who is a dear, good girl, and because, were the affair by any chance made public, your name, and possibly your daughter's, might get mixed up with it, and that would be agreeable to none of us."

"I am very glad," returned the peer, who seemed much relieved, for whatever might have been the case with Randle he greatly feared a scandal. "You have acted very wisely."

"I shall, however, write a few lines to my cousin," continued Red Ryvington; "and if you will allow me, I will write them now."

Then taking a pen he wrote as follows:

"Randle Ryvington of Deepdene,—I have had a visit from Lord Lindisfarne and I know all. For the sake of your sister and the honour of the family I refrain from inflicting upon you the chastisement and the exposure which your rascality so richly deserves.

"RANDLE RYVINGTON of Redscar."

"Laconic, certainly," observed the earl, to whom Randle handed the note for his perusal, "and very much to the point. I do not think you could say less, and it is not necessary to say more. And now, one question more, Mr. Ryvington, and my mission will be fulfilled. When may we hope to see you at Avalon? You promised, you know."

"And I shall only be too glad to keep my promise, Lord Lindisfarne; but when, I am unable to say. You see they have made an M.P. of me, and in a fortnight or so I must be in London."

"You are mistaken. Not nearly so soon as that. The

elections are going dead against the Government, and I have it on the best authority that the Premier has resolved to resign before the meeting of Parliament. That will entail an adjournment to give time for the formation of a new Ministry, and for the re-election of those of them who are members of the House of Commons. The session cannot begin in earnest for five or six weeks to come. Why not go with me to-morrow? The ladies will be dying to see you when they know I have found you, and I shall telegraph to them at once. Let me say you will accompany me—do now."

If Randle had been guided solely by a sense of duty he would probably have answered the earl's invitation with a prompt negative, for he had much to do. But the scene in the Rhone valley rose before his mental vision. Once more he held Lady Muriel in his arms, watched the bloom return to the fair cheeks from which her deadly peril for a moment had banished it; saw those beautiful eyes, eloquent with gratitude to Heaven and her deliverer, raised to his; and walked by her side down the romantic Furca Pass. He was with her at Viesch, he beheld her in the balcony at Brigue as she waved him her last adieux, and he pressed to his lips the bunch of forget-me-nots which he still cherished as a memento of the most remarkable episode in his life.

"Do I interpret your hesitation aright?" asked the peer. "May I say you will come?"

"Thank you very much, Lord Lindisfarne. Yes, I will go with you, but I can only stay with you two or three days. You do not, of course, think of starting before to-morrow morning?"

"As to that I am entirely at your disposal."

"Let it be to-morrow morning, then. And I hope you will dine with us and make our house your quarters for the night."

"Thank you, with very great pleasure. If you will oblige me with a form I will telegraph the news to Avalon."

While the earl was writing his telegram, Randle scribbled a line to his mother informing her that Lord Lindisfarne would dine with them and stay the night, and that he had accepted an invitation to go with him the next day to Avalon Priory.

"You will meet some of my political supporters," observed Red Ryvington, when the peer had finished writing his telegram. "I have invited the three to whom I am most indebted for my success to dinner this evening. They are not of very exalted rank——"

"Oh, that does not matter in the least," interrupted Lord Lindisfarne. "I shall be delighted to meet them, I am sure. God bless me, what is that?"

This exclamation was called forth by a sudden and brilliant

illumination, coming, as it seemed, from without, which filled the office with a flood of light.

"They are turning on the electric light," said Randle. "We have not succeeded in utilising it inside yet on account of the deep shadows it casts; but outside, on the belfry there, it answers admirably, lights up the yard and the boiler houses, lights the people on their way home, and enables us to dispense with road lamps altogether."

"Really. It is certainly the most powerful single light I ever saw. If it would not give you too much trouble, Mr. Ryvington, and there is time, I should be glad to take a nearer look at your establishment. I never was inside a cotton mill in my life, I am ashamed to say."

"Come now, then. There is still time before the engines stop to look through the principal rooms."

CHAPTER L.

A MEETING OF EXTREMES.

RANDLE'S note announcing the arrival of Lord Lindisfarne put his mother into a terrible flurry. An ordinary stranger was bad enough, but a lord! She had never spoken to a lord in all her life; she was not sure that she had ever even seen one.

"Whatever shall we do?" she exclaimed, in a tone of anguish, handing the note to her niece, who was staying at Redscar House that she might the more conveniently superintend the furnishing of Redscar Hall.

Dora's answer rather surprised her aunt, and it was certainly not very much to the purpose.

"I was right," she cried, with a joyful laugh, at the same time clapping her hands and making a little pirouette on the hearthrug. "I told Ran there was some dreadful mistake. I knew it would all come right in the end. And now he is going to Avalon Priory and he will see Lady Muriel. Oh, it is quite delightful! I am dying to ask Ran how it all came about. Are you not glad, aunt? I am, oh, so glad!" and the girl laughed and clapped her hands again.

"I don't think I am—at least, not very," said the old lady, dubiously. "I am not used to great folks. It is weighing on my mind very much how we shall treat Lord Lindisfarne."

"Just like any other gentleman," returned Dora, promptly; "for a peer is, or ought to be, simply a gentleman with a title."

"You don't think he will want his meals separately, then, in his own room and all by himself."

"Oh, dear, no. Do not make the slightest difference. Treat him as an ordinary guest. That is the best compliment you can pay him."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," said Mrs. Ryvington, with a sigh of relief. "It is a great weight off my mind, and the dinner party was quite enough. It is the first we have given since your poor uncle died. Did you ever meet a lord, Dora?"

"Yes, Lord Canton, Edith Canton's father. Edith was my great friend, you know. He came to see her at Nyon, and we made an excursion together to St. Cergues and the Dôle. He was a very nice old gentleman. And I once met a prince and princess at Ouchy."

"A prince and princess!" exclaimed Mrs. Ryvington, in a slightly awestruck voice. "Dear me, what were they like?"

"They were only Poles," replied the girl, somewhat disdainfully, "and Polish princes are not of much account, you know. They had a letter of introduction to Madame Vienteups, and invited all the school to Ouchy; that is how I came to know them. The prince was a little old man with the longest face I ever saw, and the princess was quite young, and smoked cigars after dinner in the garden."

"Then I don't believe she was a real princess, Dora. Women who smoke cigars in public are no better than they should be, you may be sure of that. But I must go and see after the dinner. If cook does not keep her fire clear that turkey will be underdone, and it would be such a pity, for I never saw a finer. You know who is coming, of course?"

"Yes; Ran told me before he went down to the counting-house. Mr. Twister and Mr. Striver and Bentley. It will be a strangely assorted party, I must say. A peer of the realm, a member of the House of Commons, a Russian physician, two manufacturers of humble origin and indifferent education, a weaver of genius, and you and me, aunt. A meeting of extremes, I should call it."

"Yes. I don't know what the earl will think about it, I am sure. I daresay Randle has told him, though. He has his own ideas about these things. But I must really run into the kitchen or all will be going wrong. I do hope Susan will make the custards nice. I gave her strict orders. But the girl has a head like a colander—everything seems to run out of it."

Mrs. Ryvington might have spared her anxiety. The dinner was excellently cooked and admirably served; and, as the good lady the next day observed to her niece, fit to set before a king, let alone a lord. As for the guests, albeit, as Dora had remarked, they were somewhat strangely assorted, they were not

badly matched. Nobody was dull. The earl, who possessed an observant mind, had an opportunity of studying types of character, and a phase of society which, being entirely new to him, interested him greatly, and Randle's friends learnt that an aristocrat need not necessarily be "bloated," and that a peer might be a man of pleasant disposition and unassuming manner.

Randle, who had reason to believe that Lord Lindisfarne's opinions were Conservative, kept the conversation clear of politics, and the talk ran chiefly on local and personal topics. Allusion was made to the rapid fortunes sometimes acquired in Lancashire, and to the fact that so many who have aided in the industrial development of the county palatine—or their fathers—were men of humble origin.

"You were poor once, Mr. Twister," observed Randle.

"I was that," said Twister, who, out of consideration for the earl's probable ignorance of the dialect, condescended for the nonce to discard—or rather to modify—it. "I began with nowt; I may say less than nowt; for our folks had relief fro' th' parish one while, when I was a lad. They were hard times, them were. Folks talk of the times we have had lately being bad! But they know nowt, nowt at all. Why, I can mind th' time when a working man's family did not taste flesh meat once a week. It was all spoon work—morning, noon, and neet. A hard-bread butter cake was a luxury. And they wrought twelve and fourteen hours a day, then, and no schooling for th' childer. Yes, Mr. Ryvington, I had a hard bringing up, I had that."

"And how did you attain your present position, Mr. Twister, if I may take the liberty to ask?" inquired the earl. "You have a mill of your own now, I believe?"

"I have three," said Twister, complacently, "and a 'state of land beside. Well, I started work at seven years old as sweeper in a cotton factory. They used to sweep the carriages while they were running in them days, Mr. Randle, and for a long time after. It was a dangerous job. I have known many a poor lad get crushed to death between the roller beam and the mule. And the spinners used to be terrible hard on us. They thought nowt of flogging their sweepers and creelers wi' the buckle end of a strap, or knocking 'em down with a clearer; and I have known little lads of seven and eight years old made to strip stark naked and sit on a hot steam pipe—and them that feared as though their skin was burnt into big blisters, they daren't scream. Ay, things are very different now-a-days, Mr. Lord Lindisfarne. And I will say this—that it's a good deal owing to a lord as they are different."

"You mean Lord Shaftesbury, I suppose?" said the earl.

"Yes, that's him as I mean. He got the Ten Hours Bill passed, you know; and though I didn't approve of it at the time, being then a master myself, I can see now as it is a very good thing both for employers and employed. But I must get on with my tale, or else I shall never reach th' far end. Well, after I had been sweeper awhile I got promoted to be a creeler, next to be a piecer, and as I was sharp and active, and strong for my age, I got a pair of wheels before I was twenty. After that I took to barbering."

"To what?" asked Lord Lindisfarne.

"I set up as a barber. I began w' shaving and powing some of t' other chaps of a Saturday night——"

"I beg your pardon?" interposed the earl, puzzled a second time with Mr. Twister's lingo.

"He means that he practised his prentice hand on his fellow-workmen," explained Bentley.

"That's it, Bentley, and gradely well put, too," said the manufacturer, with an approving nod. "Powing means 'air-cutting i' these parts, Mr. Lindisfarne. Well, I started a barber's shop in a cellar, and between whiles, when there was no shaving or powing going on, I learnt myself to read and write. It's faverable to learning, barbering is. A barber may pick up a good deal of information if he has got his head screwed on right. There's always somebody coming in as can tell him summut. I shaved a waste dealer one day as knew I had saved a bit o' brass, and he recommended me to do a bit of waste dealing. And I did; and I had soon so much to do as I had to give up my barbering altogether. But I'll tell you what" (with sudden earnestness), "Mr. Lord Lindisfarne, I've never been as happy sin' as I was in that cellar, though I have land and factories, and middling o' brass."

"The old story," observed the earl, with a smile: "there is more pleasure in pursuit than achievement."

"When I had made a nice little nest-egg with my waste dealing," continued Twister, "I fit up a little mill with five or six pair of mules and about a hundred looms. Ever since then I have always gone on th' same tack, and as fast as I have made money—sometimes faster—I have built factories, except th' last time, when I bought that 'state of land Mr. Ryvington has told you about."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Twister," said the earl. "You have told us a very interesting story. I congratulate you on your good fortune, which I am sure you deserve."

"Yes, I have been rather lucky, taking it altogether," assented the manufacturer, though with an air that seemed to imply that all was not gold that glittered. "But I have had my ups

and downs. I have had to knock at Lancaster Castle door—and more than once, too—but they never let me inside.”

“Mr. Twister means,” explained Randle, who perceived that the peer did not understand the metaphor, “that he has more than once been almost under the necessity of taking the benefit of the old Insolvent Debtors’ Act, which would have involved a sojourn in Lancaster Castle.”

Bentley did not say much, but what he did say was well and modestly spoken, and he surprised the earl by the shrewdness of his remarks and the extent of his information. The conversation turned on the opinions and condition of the working classes, with which the weaver was naturally well acquainted, and there were some lively passages between Kalougia and himself on the subject of Socialism. He assured the Russian that the leaders of opinion in the class to which he belonged neither coveted the wealth of the rich nor asked for social equality; all that they wanted were equality before the law, a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work, impartial administration of justice, and such reforms as these demands implied. Justice, as at present administered, he continued, gave the well-to-do a great advantage over the poor. They did not want patronising, and they would rather help themselves than be helped by the State. As for Socialism, he did not think there were ten workmen in all Whitebrook besides himself who had the most remote idea what it was. On this Kalougia gave some account of Continental Socialism, and of the theories of Proudhon, Bakounine, and Marx.

“Collective anarchy, do they call it?” said the weaver, “and you think the theory originated with Proudhon? You are mistaken; it was originated by an Englishman.”

“By an Englishman?”

“Yes, by an Englishman. I think you will find in Shelley’s ‘Queen Mab’ the root idea of these theories that Mr. Kalougia has been telling us about. I will try to recall the lines in which the thought is expressed:—

“ ‘Nature rejects the monarch, not the man;
The subject, not the citizen; for kings
And subjects, mutual foes, for ever play
A losing game into each other’s hands,
Whose stakes are vice and misery. The man
Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys.
Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whate’er it touches; and obedience,
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of men, and of the human frame
A mechanised automaton.’ ”

“A very apt quotation, Mr. Bentley,” said the peer. “Poets

sometimes see farther than anybody else; and, as you have observed, Shelley in those lines seems to have anticipated the latest development of Socialism. They do right to call it anarchy. By-the-by, Mr. Bentley, the working classes hereabouts are loyal, I presume—no Republicanism among them, eh?”

“It would be more correct to say they are not disloyal, Lord Lindisfarne. If they are not passionately attached to the Royal family, they are at least not hostile to it. Their attitude, in fact, is one of indifference. I can perhaps best explain my meaning by a bit of an anecdote. I read in a paper a little while ago that Prince Leopold had endeared himself to every class of the nation, and I took a fancy to ask a number of my fellow-workmen who Prince Leopold was. Not one of them had ever heard of him, or, if they had, they had forgotten. It is not easy for us that have to work for our living to take much interest in folks we never see, Lord Lindisfarne. As for a republic, I have no doubt the Whitebrook lads would vote for a republic to-morrow if they thought it would raise their wages ten per cent.—ay, or five. That’s about the true state of the case, I think.”

At this point Randle, fearing that the harmony of the evening was in danger of being marred by a discussion on politics, judiciously changed the subject.

When the time came for them to separate, Lord Lindisfarne shook hands cordially with the weaver and the two manufacturers, and said that he was indebted to them for a very pleasant evening.

Twister was heard to say afterwards that the earl was a very pleasant gentleman. The only fault that he had to find with him, he said, was his twang; but for real cleverness he was not fit to hold a candle to Bill Bentley. Bill could talk “pottery.”

CHAPTER LI.

BEWITCHED.

BEFORE Randle set out on his journey with Lord Lindisfarne, he was waylaid by his cousin.

“Oh! Ran,” she exclaimed, eagerly, “how was it? Tell me all about it. Why has Lord Lindisfarne come? Why did he not write? And Lady Muriel, what does she say?”

“The explanation is very simple, Dora. Lord Lindisfarne lost the card on which I had written my address, and, as he knew neither my Christian name nor where I lived, it was not very easy for him to write. He has come because he saw my name

in the papers in connection with the election, and thought I was the man. That's all," said Randle, who had not the heart to tell her about her brother's treachery.

"Just as I expected. I knew there must be some misunderstanding. Why would you not let me write, you foolish old Ran?"

"It is better as it is, Dora. Lord Lindisfarne is a peer and a great man. I am only a manufacturer and a very insignificant person; and if I had written, or permitted you to write, it would have seemed as if I wanted to intrude myself on his notice; and I never toadied to any human being in my life, and I never will."

"Why, Ran, I do believe you are proud—prouder than Lord Lindisfarne himself. Indeed, he does not seem proud one bit. But never mind that. All's well that ends well, and it is going to end well. Put me down as no true Lancashire witch if it does not. But you have not told me what Lady Muriel says."

"I will tell you when she says it."

"That is a promise, remember, which I shall expect you to honour at maturity, as people honour bills. Now stoop—stoop, I tell you," she repeated, with a peremptory stamp of her foot. Randle stooped.

"There now" (waving her fan over his head), "I have bewitched you—woven a spell that will win you the love of the lady of your dreams. Don't deny it, now. I am a Lancashire witch, recollect, and I can read hearts and control destinies. But you want to go, and I am not surprised. Just think, Ran, you will see her this very day."

"What nonsense you talk, Dora!" said Randle, trying to look a reproof, but smiling in spite of himself.

"Oh, no, Ran, it is true sense, not nonsense. But I think I have teased you enough. Kiss me, and get you gone to Avalon. We are both bespoken now, you know, so nobody has any right to be jealous."

Randle kissed her accordingly.

"You can take one for Lady Muriel, if you like, old Ran," she whispered, demurely, yet with a look so bewitching that her cousin thought Sergius Kalongia, in spite of his misfortunes, ought to be esteemed one of the most fortunate of men.

It was impossible to resist such an invitation. Randle kissed his cousin a second time.

"That is for Lady Muriel, remember," she exclaimed, with a monitory shake of her forefinger. "If you do not give it to her I will have you prosecuted for breach of trust."

And then, with an arch glance and a merry laugh, she tripped away, leaving her cousin to his thoughts, which, if not quite

roseate-hued, as she had tried to make them, were certainly free from any tinge of sadness.

"That Mr. Twister seems somewhat of a character, eh?" observed Lord Lindisfarne, shortly after he and his host had left Whitebrook.

"Yes, Twister has his peculiarities, but he isn't a bad fellow for all that."

"Rather close-fisted, I should say. Men of that stamp generally are, I think."

"He is and he is not. In business he shaves very fine indeed; but he can be liberal after his own fashion. For instance, he is subscribing £500 towards my election expenses. Nobody asked him, but he said he did not think it was right that I should give both my time and my money; and he would put down £500 if anybody else would."

"And was the challenge accepted?"

"Yes, Striver accepted it."

"So your election will not cost you much?"

"Very little indeed; two or three hundred pounds, perhaps. Twister is no more capable of giving thoughtlessly than of doing business recklessly. He gave his £500 in such a way as to ensure another subscription of equal amount. The other day he treated all the inmates of the workhouse to high tea. But he took precious good care not to pay too much for his tea. He went to two or three wholesale houses in Manchester, got their lowest quotations, and gave the order where he could get the best terms. And he is behaving very well about Bentley."

"Do you know, I feel sorry for that man. Setting him to weave is like putting a racehorse in a plough. Can nothing be done for him?"

"Something is going to be done for him. But his case is rather a difficult one. Though not an extravagant man, Bentley does not appear to have the knack of saving money. I fancy all he can spare goes in books. And he married young and has several children. It is extremely hard for a man so circumstanced to rise unhelped, and I happened to remark to Twister the other day, that if anybody would join me, I would try to put Bentley into a better position. 'All right, Mr. Randle,' he said; 'I will do as much as you will, whatever it is.' So we are going to make Bentley into a barrister. He will study privately until he can matriculate at London University, and then eat his dinners and pass his examinations."

"And how about the family?"

"We shall allow the family the amount of Bentley's present wages; that will be enough to keep them until he begins to earn something, and, as all Whitebrook takes an interest in him, he is

RED RYVINGTON.

get business. He will become the weavers' attorney-some day, perhaps."

"You are very generous, I am sure. I hope, for your sake as for his own, Mr. Bentley will get on and be a credit concerned."

London Priory was in an adjoining county, some seven or eight miles from our railway journey from Whitebrook. A fine Gothic building, originally built in the vigorous style of the fourteenth century, but allowed to fall into ruin, it was restored by the late possessor's grandfather early in the nineteenth century at an enormous cost, and has ever since been the showplace of the county. Everything about it is on a scale of correspondence with its grandeur. The park is almost as large as a township. A regiment of dragoons might be quartered in the offices, and hundreds of horses housed in the stables.

"It is a great deal too big," said Lord Lindisfarne, in reply to the remark of Randle's about the vastness of the park, as they were driving through it from Highbrook Station, where they had just alighted from the train. "A great deal too big a place is Avalon, and it is expensive to maintain. You see, the property is strictly entailed on me."

"I am only tenant for life. I cannot cut down a tree without the consent of the trustees, and, though the rent-roll is small, it is not exactly ducal. At any rate, with two estates on my hands, a place like this to keep up, a castle in the country, and a house in London, three daughters and six sons to provide for, I don't find it too much, I assure you."

"It was certainly a very hard case, and Randle said so in his own terms, albeit his host's confession of comparative poverty, and his complaint of a superfluity of mansions and a plethora of children, gave him more pleasure than if he had heard that Randle could dower his daughters with £100,000 each and his sons a million apiece."

"Yes," continued the earl, with a little sigh, "it is not very pleasant when you have ten children to give each of them a fortune, especially when the eldest takes the lion's share. I think I shall follow the example of the Duke of Dunoon, and put my boys into business. They cannot all go into the army, and the professions are crowded to repletion."

"What of the young lord Avalon is in the army, I believe?"

"Yes, he is a lieutenant in the Horse Guards Blue, and my youngest son, Algernon, is in the navy. He is at home just now. You will meet him this evening. The others are at school and college. Ah, there are some friends of yours, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Ryvington."

The earl looked in the direction indicated by the earl.

Coming down the grassy ride to the right of the avenue were two ladies on horseback, followed by a belted groom. As they drew nearer, and perceived the travellers, they let their steeds go free and raced for the carriage.

It was a pretty sight. The towers and turrets of Avalon showing grandly in the distance, two fair Amazons galloping gaily over the verdant turf in the purple light of the setting sun, between two rows of dark and stately elm-trees, colonies of rooks flying and cawing overhead, groups of graceful deer drinking their fill from a crystal brook that purred through the park. The sight interested Randle keenly, for in the horsewomen he recognised his friends of the Furca Pass, the Ladies Maude and Muriel Avalon.

"Lady Muriel is riding Sprightly, I think?" said Lord Lindisfarne to the coachman, as he eyed critically the galloping horses.

"Yes, my lord; and Lady Maude is riding Rattler."

"And Sprightly has the best turn of speed. I should hardly have thought it. But I do not think he has equal staying power. We must have a match one of these days."

At any rate Sprightly was the first, and Lady Muriel reached the carriage a good two minutes before her sister.

"Yes, papa, it is he," she exclaimed, as she reined up and offered Randle her hand; "there is no mistake this time. How could we have been so deceived? I am so glad you have brought him. Welcome to Avalon, Mr. Ryvington. You do not think us rude or ungrateful? Papa has explained?"

Randle murmured something in reply, he hardly knew what. He was absorbed in the contemplation of Lady Muriel and her horse.

Lady Muriel, though perhaps a little taller, more developed and woman-like, was still the same as when he parted from her at Brigue. There was the same winsome smile, the same gracious, unaffected manner, the same dark brown eyes, so soft and expressive, the same sweet mouth, dimpled chin, and golden hair.

Her horse was worthy of his fair rider. Sprightly was a little thorough-bred, flea-bitten grey, as perfect in form as Nature could make him. A small, intelligent head, well set on; wide, red nostrils; a long, arched neck; a short, thick body; sloping shoulders, powerful quarters, well-bent hocks, springy fetlocks, and legs, though fine, as muscular as the limbs of an athlete, as hard and elastic as steel.

As Randle watched them—Sprightly in his excitement pawing the ground and tossing his head, while Muriel, her colour heightened by the excitement of the gallop, and her eyes bright with pleasure, leaned back in her saddle and talked to her father

and himself—he thought he had never, in all his life, seen a lovelier picture or a more charming group.

Then Lady Maude came up, and they moved on towards the house, the sisters riding on either side of the carriage.

“Any news, Maude?” asked the earl.

“Nothing very particular, I think. Oh, yes, there is, though; the hounds meet to-morrow at Highthorpe Green, and Algy wants us to go out with him. I suppose we may?”

“Certainly. Are you a hunting man, Mr. Ryvington?”

“I have hunted, and I used to be very fond of the sport; though, since my father died, I have had little time for that or any other amusement.”

“At any rate, you are no novice. Would you like to go out with my son and my daughters to-morrow? I promise to mount you well.”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Ryvington, do come,” chorused Ladies Maude and Muriel. “It will be so nice. Highthorpe Green is one of the best fixtures in the county.”

“Nothing would give me greater pleasure, but unfortunately I have no hunting things with me,” returned Randle, who, in his present mood and with the present company, would have been delighted to go to the worst fixture in the country on the slowest horse in the earl’s stables.

“Do not let that trouble you, Mr. Ryvington,” said Lord Lindisfarne; “we can find you everything you want, I think. And you shall ride Ferryman. He rushes his fences rather, but he never makes a mistake, and he will jump anything he can see over.”

So it was agreed that Randle should go a-hunting next day, with the Ladies Maude and Muriel and the Hon. Algernon Avalon for his companions.

He did not see the countess until he met her in the drawing-room shortly before dinner. She received him very kindly, but made not the most remote allusion to Deep Randle and his doings, from which Red Randle rightly inferred that it had been decided to say no more about him. And it was better so. His cousin had deceived the Avalons, abused their hospitality, and personated him, and it would profit nothing to discuss a matter which had already been sufficiently explained.

Randle took Lady Muriel down to dinner.

“Oh, Mr. Ryvington,” she said, when they were seated at table, “I have read your speeches with so much pleasure. Nothing could have been in better taste than your remarks about that poor Mr. Mellodew. My mother said that one speech alone was enough to stamp Mr. Ryvington as a true gentleman. And I quite agree with what you say about the working people and

the upper classes. Our lives, I am afraid, are very useless and idle. But what can we do? Above all, what can a girl do? You are very fortunate in being able to do so much good. Papa was telling us before you came into the drawing-room about your mills and your improvements, your electricity, and that, which interested him very much, and what you are doing for that very remarkable workman he met at your house."

"But where have you read my speeches, Lady Muriel?" said Randle, very much surprised. "None of them, so far as I know, have been mentioned in the London papers, much less reported."

"It is not to you, then, that I am indebted for the two *Whitebrook Guardians* I received this morning?" replied Lady Muriel, in her turn surprised. "Who can have sent them, then?"

"That is exactly what I am asking myself. I have it!" he went on, after a moment's cogitation. "It must be; yes, it can be nobody but Dora."

"And who is Dora, pray?"

"My cousin."

"Is she a young lady?"

"About your own age, I fancy, Lady Muriel."

"And nice-looking?"

"She is nice in every sense of the word," answered Randle, warmly, "and dearer to me almost than a sister."

"Indeed, she must be quite a paragon. I hope some time to have the pleasure of making your Miss Dora's acquaintance," said Lady Muriel, coldly, and as she spoke she turned her face the other way and entered into a lively conversation with her left-hand neighbour, the Rector of Highthorpe.

This sudden change of manner, which continued throughout the evening, both puzzled and provoked Randle. He thought it augured badly for the hopes which, although he knew it was dangerous to cherish, he yet found it impossible to repress. For, whatever might be the case with Lady Muriel, Dora's spell was working with him most potently. He felt like a man bewitched, and asked himself more than once if it were not all a dream.

CHAPTER LII.

DITCHED.

BEFORE Randle rose next morning the servant who had been told off to look after him brought into his room a pile of leggings, from which, after several tries-on, he succeeded in selecting a pair that, as his attendant observed, could not have fitted him better "if they had been ordered express."

In the breakfast-room he found Lady Muriel, who was the earliest riser in the family, like himself, attired for the chase.

"Here are some letters for you, Mr. Ryvington," she said, after they had exchanged greetings; and Randle, with a sinking of the heart, remarked that her manner was little less constrained than it had been the night before. He began to fear that he had done something to offend her; what, he could not imagine, though he would have given a great deal to know.

One of the letters was from Dora.

"I guessed rightly, Lady Muriel," he said, after casting a glance at the letter. "It was my cousin who sent you those newspapers."

"I am very much obliged to her, I am sure. Is she a sister of the—the other Mr. Ryvington?"

"Yes, she is Miss Ryvington of Deepdene. But she is staying with us at present. She is to be married next month, and her future home——"

"Married!" interrupted Lady Muriel, as Randle thought, rather abruptly. "And you are the happy man, I suppose? I congratulate you, Mr. Ryvington."

"Oh dear, no," replied Randle, with an amused smile. "Sergius Kalougia is the happy one. And he ought to be happy, for he has won a prize any man might be proud to win."

"Kalougia? That is the name of the Russian gentleman papa met at your house, I think. I hope he is worthy of so peerless a bride, and that your cousin will be happy in her marriage," rejoined Lady Muriel, brightly, and with a change in manner so marked as to suggest to Randle a suspicion which made him as confident and elated as a few minutes before he had been doubtful and depressed. "When you next write to Miss Ryvington, kindly convey to her my best wishes, and say that I hope soon to have the pleasure of making her acquaintance."

At this point their colloquy was interrupted by the advent of Algernon, who was every inch a sailor, bluff, frank, and high-spirited. Next came Lady Maude, then the earl, and when the countess appeared it was almost time to mount. The nearest way to the meet, for many members of the hunt, lay through the

park, and red-coated horsemen could already be seen pricking across the turf in the direction of Highthorpe Green.

"See, the hounds are in sight! We must have the horses brought round at once," exclaimed the Honourable Algernon as he rang the bell to give the order.

He had hardly spoken when the pack passed the house, headed by a keen-looking, clean-limbed huntsman, whose purple visage matched well with his weather-stained pink. Two whippers-in, who seemed as fit to go as the horses they bestrode and the hounds they followed, brought up the rear.

"You ride Sprightly, I suppose?" said Algernon to Muriel.

"Of course, and Maude rides Rattler. What else have we to ride? Papa cannot keep a stud for each of us, you know. Ah! here they come. Look at Sprightly. Isn't he a beauty? And he is all the better for the gallop I gave him yesterday, Prancer says." (Prancer was the stud groom.) "That is Ferryman, Mr. Ryvington, the big chestnut with the three white legs. He will carry you well. Avalon—my brother Clarence, you know—says there is not his equal in all Moreland."

A few minutes later all were mounted and mingling in the equine stream, which was now flowing, in ever-increasing volume, towards the meet. The earl, who rode a powerful grey, was with them, but he informed Randle that his riding-to-hounds days were over, and when he had seen Low Gyll Gorse drawn he meant to return to the Priory.

"Papa always says that," laughed Lady Muriel. "Yet he sometimes contrives to be in at the finish when some of the first flight are nowhere. Don't you, papa?"

"Yes," said the earl, smiling in return, "the old feeling does come over me sometimes. I am like a superannuated war-horse, who, when he hears the bugle call, forgets age and infirmities and joins in the charge."

The scene on Highthorpe Green—a broad expanse of unenclosed heath in the neighbourhood of a quaint, old-fashioned village—was animated and picturesque. The hounds, watched by the huntsman and his whips, were reposing at the foot of an ancient oak. A hundred well-mounted horsemen in pink, among whom were interspersed two or three score others in costumes as nondescript as their steeds, paced to and fro, stood at ease near their horses, and lolled carelessly in their saddles. Other cavaliers and carriages, some of them filled with bebies of fair girls, whose presence lent additional life and variety to the gathering, were arriving every minute.

The appearance of the master was the signal for action, and a few minutes after his arrival the cavalcade moved off in the direction of Low Gyll Gorse.

"Which way do you think the fox will break, papa?" asked Lady Maude, when they had reached the gorse.

"That's hard to say," answered the earl, "for though it could hardly be possible to have a finer hunting day, there is no wind, and therefore no telling which way he will break; but I think we had better remain on this side, although many of the others seem to be of a different opinion."

Low Gyll Gorse was an extensive enclosure, half gorse, half wood—a sure find, but difficult to get away from with hounds. An awkward gully, too wide to be jumped, and too deep to be scrambled in and out of, intersected the covert, and ran far into the fields at either end of it. There was only one place where this gully could be crossed—in single file—and people who happened to be on the wrong side of it at the beginning of a run, had a very remote chance of seeing anything of the finish.

Lord Lindisfarne's prevision was justified by the event. Ten minutes after the huntsman had waved his hounds into the covert a whimper was heard in that part of it near which the party from the Priory were awaiting the signal.

"Hark to Venus!" shouted the huntsman, and the note he blew on his horn was followed by a melodious din from the deep-throated hounds, which, in the ears of many who heard it, sounded as sweetly as strains of heavenly music.

"Tally ho, gone away!" sang out one of the whips, and Randle was the first to sight the fox as he stole from the covert, and with a saucy fling of his white-tipped brush ran out into the open.

"Hold hard; give them a chance!" cried the earl, as some of the riders near him began to move too eagerly forward.

Then the hounds, followed by the huntsman, tumbled pell-mell out of the enclosure and rushed frantically after the flying fox.

"Now," said the earl, when the pack had fairly settled to their work, and, giving their chafing horses the rein, all who were on the right side of the gully went off at full speed.

Randle and Lady Muriel led the field. Algernon and Lady Maude were close behind them. The earl took a line of his own. It was Randle's first day with foxhounds, and as he raced over the elastic turf, the hounds in full cry, Lady Muriel by his side, and the world before him, he felt, in the excitement of the moment, as if he had only just then begun to live.

The fences were easy. Quickthorn hedges, rarely rising to the dignity of bullfinches, with a ditch on one side, low banks, and an occasional flight of hurdles, offered no difficulties to a man who had been accustomed to ride among the small enclosures, big cops, and high stoue walls of the country about Whitebrook.

The most formidable obstacle they encountered was a drain some sixteen feet broad, with a fence on the taking-off side.

Randle pointed to it with his whip.

"Lead, and I will follow," cried Lady Muriel, who seemed little less excited than himself.

Ferryman, who had gained his name by his prowess as a water jumper, took the drain in his stride. Sprightly followed in the chestnut's wake, and the next moment Lady Muriel—her hair, which had escaped from its fastenings, streaming behind her—and Randle were galloping side by side. Then came some soft ground, which tried the stamina of their steeds, and made them moderate their pace. Then some more grass, a few more fences, another gallop, and after a brilliant burst of twenty-five minutes the fox was run into before their eyes.

Randle dismounted and helped Lady Muriel to dismount, for their horses had gone bravely, and well deserved a few minutes' rest.

"Why, how you two went!" exclaimed Algernon when he came up. "I never saw you ride so well before, Muriel. Maude generally beats you by a long way, but you have the pull over her this time, and no mistake. The way you went over that drain was a caution. Why, it stopped half the field."

"There is something in having a good pilot, is there not, Muriel?" said Lady Maude, with a sly glance at her sister.

Lady Muriel was saved the trouble of answering by the huntsman, who came, hat in hand, to offer her the brush and the master's compliments.

"Oh, no, thank you," said Lady Muriel, turning with a shudder from the astonished Nimrod; "I don't want the poor creature's brush. Take the horrid thing away, please."

"That is the worst of hunting, don't you think, Mr. Ryvington?"

"The fox's tail? It is the end, at any rate."

"Please don't make fun of me, Mr. Ryvington," rejoined the young lady, earnestly. "I thought you would understand me. It seems so cruel to kill a wretched animal—to set dogs to worry it—for our amusement. I enjoy the gallop, but I hate the kill. I have only seen one before, and I do not want to see another."

"Well, Lady Muriel, I don't quite agree with you as to the exceptional cruelty of fox-hunting. A fox is a carnivorous animal, and it is as much in the nature of things for dogs to hunt foxes as for foxes to prey upon poultry, rabbits, and other small deer. To be occasionally hunted is a necessary condition of their existence, and if they were not preserved for sport their plundering propensities would very soon be punished by complete extirpation. I don't know, either, how their numbers could be

kept down more mercifully than by hunting them. They have always a chance of escaping, and when they are killed they die at once, not by inches, as do hundreds of poor maimed hares and rabbits and partridges every shooting season. Hare hunting is altogether different; that is cruel; and the cruelty of the sport is the principal reason why I have given it up, and why I shoot so little. Anybody who has heard the death-cry of a poor hare when seized by hounds, or when she springs into the air, mortally wounded by a shot, has heard the most pitiful sound, I think, that ears can listen to."

"Oh, yes, it must be terrible; but I never heard it, and trust I never shall. I cannot tell you how glad I am, Mr. Ryvington, to find somebody who thinks as I think. But I would not advise you to repeat what you have just said to—to anybody else. I am afraid they would not appreciate it."

"I know what you mean. I should only get laughed at for my pains. You may rely on my discretion. I do not think I ever said so much on the subject to anybody before."

"Hallo, there; aren't you coming?" shouted Algernon. "They are going to draw Claverton Wood. A fox was seen there not an hour ago."

"Would you like to go on, Lady Muriel?" asked Randle.

"Yes, I think so. It would look strange not to, you know. And you do not think fox-hunting cruel; and the riding across country is so very enjoyable."

"And if there is another kill I will take care you do not see it."

The reynard that had been seen an hour ago was not long in being found, and proved himself an unusually tough customer. He led the chase over a decidedly rough country, and a good deal of it. Randle, who had a keen sense of his responsibilities as pilot, was content to keep the hounds well in view, and made no attempt to ride for glory. And he had his reward, for, after awhile, when some of the first flight were no more to be seen, Ferryman and Sprightly were going well, taking their fences easily, and showing no signs of distress. Some of the fences were "big 'uns," and no mistake, and they were in great variety—banks with double ditches, banks with rails and banks without, hurdles, drains, stone walls, quickthorn hedges with wattled tops, and an occasional bullfinch dark as night. The field thinned rapidly, falls were frequent, and more than one riderless steed was galloping at the tail of the hounds.

The run had lasted more than an hour, with only one slight check, and there was no sign of it coming to an end, when Randle, who was riding a few score yards ahead of Lady Muriel, the better to show her the way, saw before him a widish ditch with

a low rail on the hither side. Choosing what seemed the easiest place, he went at it with a slack rein. He had found that Ferryman always jumped best when his head was free.

He had almost reached the brink of the ditch, his horse was gathering himself for the leap, when he heard behind him a great shouting, followed by a piercing scream.

"Hold hard!"

"For God's sake, look out!"

"Out of the way, or you'll be killed," and other cries of warning and alarm were repeated in rapid succession.

But they were all too late. Ferryman was in mid air. A riderless horse cannoned against him with tremendous force. A blinding light flashed before Randle's eyes. He felt as if he were being hurled through space. Then there was a great smash, something struck his head, and he remembered no more.

CHAPTER LIII.

RELEASED.

WHEN Randle came to himself his first impression was that he had wakened with a very bad headache in a damp bed under a portentous pile of blankets. But when he tried to rise he found he was lying, not in a damp bed, but at the bottom of a damp ditch. And well for him it was damp, for the weight that oppressed him was a part of Ferryman's body, and nothing but the softness of his couch had saved Randle from being crushed to death or desperately hurt.

After making several strenuous efforts to regain his footing, and finding them ineffectual, the horse, as horses are wont to do in such circumstances, had resigned himself to the inevitable, and was tranquilly munching the long grass that covered the sides of the ditch. There was a small crowd about, and among the faces that looked down upon him Randle recognised that of Lady Muriel—pale, pitiful, and distressed.

"See, he is opening his eyes," he heard her exclaim; "he is coming round. Are you much hurt, Mr. Ryvington?"

"Not much," he murmured, "if I could only get up."

"We have sent a man for ropes. Oh, what a time he is! When he comes they will pull Ferryman up and release you."

"Stirrup leathers," gasped Randle.

"Do you hear, Algernon? Mr. Ryvington has more wit than all of you put together. Make a rope of stirrup leathers. Why did we not think of it before?"

The sailor, without answering a word, rushed off to make a collection of stirrup leathers.

"Can any one oblige me with a brandy-flask, please?" asked Lady Muriel.

A brandy-flask was immediately forthcoming, whereupon, gathering her skirts about her, she slipped into the ditch, and raising Randle's head with one hand gave him to drink with the other, for he was evidently very faint.

"Are you in much pain, Mr. Ryvington?" she whispered, kindly. "But I need not ask; you must be."

"I am not in pain at all, Lady Muriel," he whispered back; "the ditch is soft, and you are near."

"What does he say?" asked her brother, as he plunged into the ditch with his stirrup leathers.

"Nothing very particular—something—something I did not quite catch," said Muriel, though with a heightened colour that somewhat belied her words. "I am afraid, Algy, he is growing a little delirious."

"Poor fellow! He came a terrible cropper. I daresay his head is a bit touched."

"Heart," muttered Red Ryvington, and Lady Muriel blushed a second time.

"Did you hear that, Muriel? He is off his head, sure enough," said the sailor, compassionately. "The sooner we get him out of this hole the better. Stand back, and let me run this rope round old Ferryman's carcass."

This done, the ends of the improvised rope were handed to two or three rustics, whom curiosity had drawn to the spot, with instructions at a given word to pull as hard as they could, while Algernon and another of the hunters stood by to drag Randle from under the horse, as soon as the latter began to rise.

"Yo, heave ho!" cried the sailor, whereupon the rustics gave a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, and their efforts being seconded by Ferryman, the horse was raised sufficiently to admit of Red Ryvington's extrication before the animal began to make play with his hoofs.

The next thing was to hoist Randle out of the ditch, an undertaking which, seeing that his legs were so stiff and benumbed that he could not use them, was not unattended with difficulty. But it was done, and Ferryman, apparently not much worse for his mishap, scrambled out of the hole almost at the same time. As for the cause of all the trouble, the runaway horse, he lay with his legs upward and a broken back, and a day or two afterwards became food for the hounds he had so often followed.

Randle was in a far worse plight than when he emerged from the bed of the Rhone in the Furca Pass.

After walking about a little, supported on one side by Algernon and on the other by the gentleman who had helped him out of the ditch, he recovered the use of his legs; but he had got an ugly knock on the head, from which the blood was flowing freely, and he seemed very weak and dazed.

Lady Muriel looked on with mute pity—during the last few minutes she had been strangely silent—and gave him to drink a second time, for he was wet through and shivering with cold.

“Thank you very much,” said Randle; “I feel better now. How long was I down there, Mr. Algernon?”

“Not more than ten minutes, I think. But you came very near being killed, Mr. Ryvington. When I saw you go down, and, as it seemed, both those horses on the top of you, I thought you were done for, and no mistake. Do you still feel better?”

“Much. I think I might mount again if Ferryman is fit to carry me. Where are the hounds?”

“Out of sight long since. But you cannot follow them any more to-day, my dear sir. We must get you home at once, and have your hurts attended to. Let me help you up.”

When Randle tried to place his right hand on the cantle of the saddle, he fell back with a suppressed groan. The arm, either by reason of a severe sprain or a fracture, was useless. But he made a second effort, and, aided by Algernon, succeeded in gaining his seat.

“Oh, Algy!” said Lady Muriel, with outward calm, though in reality greatly agitated, “Mr. Ryvington is badly hurt. He cannot possibly ride to Avalon. What shall we do?”

“Oh, yes, I can ride very well,” said Randle, as he tried, not very successfully, to steady himself in the saddle.

On this one of the hunters came forward, and, saying that his house, Claverton Hall, was hard by, offered to send Mr. Ryvington home in his carriage.

The offer was gratefully accepted, and the owner of Claverton Hall galloped off to give the necessary order, while Randle and the Avalons rode slowly after him.

The carriage was soon ready, and Randle, who, though not seriously hurt, was sufficiently so to be glad of the change from pigskin to cushions, had got inside, when Lady Muriel suggested a difficulty.

“He might faint or something, you know,” she said. “Somebody should go with him.”

“Suppose you go with him, Muriel,” suggested Lady Maude, in an undertone, looking mischievously at her sister. “You and he seem to get on very well together.”

"Oh, Maude! how can you tease at such a time?" returned Lady Muriel, reproachfully. "Is he not our guest? Did he not save my life?"

"I tell you what," said Algernon, who had not observed this little by-play, "you two shall go in the carriage with Mr. Ryvington, and I will ride round by the village and send Dr. Popjoy up to the Priory. One of the grooms can return with the carriage and bring your horses home."

This proposal was immediately acted upon. Algernon rode off at a canter, and the two ladies stepped into the carriage. Lady Maude, heedless of a mild protest from her sister, so contrived matters as to compel Muriel to sit beside Randle, an arrangement to which, as may be supposed, the member for Whitebrook offered no objection.

Very little was said by the way. Maude leaned back in her corner and closed her eyes as if in sleep. Randle did not feel equal to making his voice heard above the rattle of the carriage, yet the sense of Muriel's presence, the opportunity his position gave him of looking at her unobserved, of watching her every movement, and trying to read her thoughts, rendered him oblivious to such trifling ills as aching limbs and a throbbing head.

His companion passed most of the time gazing in quiet pensiveness from the carriage window; but once or twice, when she turned towards Randle, their eyes met, and there flitted over her face the sweet shadow of a smile which told him, as plainly as words could tell, that her musings were not unpleasant, and his heart beat wildly at the thought that he might be the subject of them. For the intoxication of love was taking hold of him, and he felt its power with an intensity of which a man of weaker mould had not been capable. The flame first kindled in the valley of the Rhone, and kept alive by the promptings of his cousin, was being developed by intercourse with Muriel into a passion as strong as his own nature. But he cherished no illusions. He knew as well as he had ever known that the disparity in their rank might prove an insurmountable barrier to the consummation of his hopes. He had not sounded the depths of Muriel's character; he did not forget that, even if she should love him, she might not love him sufficiently to brave the opposition of her family and marry a man who, in the opinion of the society to which she belonged, was so far beneath her. Yet, knowing all this, he never for a moment thought of drawing back, or of trying to bury his love in his own heart. Just as sometimes a man who has never gambled in his life will risk his all in a single speculation, so Randle, as he sat there in the carriage, with his bandaged head and his body aching all over,

deliberately resolved to stake his happiness on a single cast of the die, and swore to himself that, before he left Avalon, he would ask Lady Muriel to be his wife.

CHAPTER LIV.

BETROTHED.

RANDLE and the ladies reached the Priory only a few minutes before Dr. Popjoy (a large, heavy man, with big eyes that looked as if they had been boiled) and the Honourable Algernon. The countess and Lord Lindisfarne (who had left the field after the first run) expressed great concern at the accident which had befallen their guest; and the earl helped him to his room and remained with him until the doctor had delivered his report. Besides the wound on his head, Randle had received contusions in various parts of his body. His right arm was badly sprained, his left leg ditto, and he had been so chilled by lying in the ditch, and by the ride home in his damp clothes, that Dr. Popjoy hinted at the possibility of fever, ordered a warm bath, and enjoined rest and perfect quiet.

"That arm won't be of much use to you for a week or more," he said; "but if you keep perfectly quiet, and the feverish symptoms do not increase, you may possibly be on your legs again in three or four days."

"You surely do not mean to say that I shall have to keep my room for three or four days?" exclaimed Randle, with a look of dismay.

"Not your room merely, but your bed, my dear sir. Bed, Mr. Ryvington, is one of our most efficient remedial agents. But do not suppose I shall keep you on your back one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. I know too well what enforced idleness is. A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, you know. I once had a bad spill in hunting myself; my horse fell on me just as yours did, and I was compelled, or rather, I compelled myself, to stop in bed a fortnight. It was a weary time, and you have my warmest sympathy. A medical man ought to be sympathetic, you know."

Dr. Popjoy was a fairly successful practitioner, but if he had been less garrulous and less ostensibly sympathetic, he would probably have been more successful. He was an irrepressible talker, and, though his patients might know when to expect him, they never knew when he would leave them. He made a speciality of sympathy. He had suffered, according to his own

account, from nearly every ill that flesh is heir to, and, whatever complaint people might be suffering from, he invariably assured them of his warmest sympathy, "having himself felt the same," and adduced the fact of his happy recovery as sure ground of hope. He had once, from mere force of habit, when presiding at the introduction into the world of the son and heir of a neighbouring squire, tried to cheer the lady by a reference to his own experience; and it became a standing joke on the country side that, though Dr. Popjoy (who was a childless man) had never been a father, he knew what it was to be a mother.

Randle stayed in bed all the next day, as he had been ordered; he was so stiff and sore, indeed, that he could hardly have done otherwise. Every care was taken of him. A servant was always at his call. The earl came several times to see him, and Algernon, who was a great rattle and capital company, sat by his bedside a great part of the day reading and talking to him. If it had been *comme il faut*, Muriel would doubtless have paid him a visit also; but, that not being possible, she made particular inquiry of her brother, whenever she met him, as to how Mr. Ryvington was doing.

"I am afraid he is off his head again," said the middy, with a portentous shake of his own, on one of these occasions.

"Oh! I hope, not, Algernon. What makes you think so?"

"Well, I asked him just now what was the name of the place he lives at; and what do you think he said?"

"I am sure I don't know, Algernon," replied the girl, looking innocently at her brother. "What did he say?"

"Muriel!"

"Yes, Algernon."

"You do not understand. I mean that Mr. Ryvington said, 'Muriel.' Don't you think that looks as if there was still a little—what do you call it?—pressure on the brain, you know?"

"Perhaps he was dreaming," returned Muriel, demurely, who, though she blushed somewhat, did not lose her composure; "dreaming about yesterday, you know."

"Perhaps you are right," said Algernon, thoughtfully. "I think he did doze a little sometimes when I was talking to him; but the blind was drawn on account of his headache, and I could not see very well. I daresay you are right."

"I am sure I am," replied Muriel, with an air of great decision. "And if I were you I would not suggest to any of the others that Mr. Ryvington is off his head; they will only laugh at you."

Muriel's suggestion was so far true that if Randle was not actually asleep when he gave the answer which so naturally surprised Algernon, he was between sleeping and waking. and

hardly conscious of what he said. But "Muriel" was the clue to his thoughts, and herself the substance of them.

After Dr. Popjoy had seen him on the following morning, assured him of his sympathy, and told him that, if all went well, he would, perhaps, be able to leave his room on the next day but one, Randle resolved to get up forthwith. So he summoned his attendant, and took a hot bath, followed by a cold douche, which so soothed his aches and raised his spirits that he felt quite fit to go downstairs. Guided by a hint from his man that the ladies often spent a part of the morning in the library, and that, in any case, he would be very quiet there, he proceeded to the apartment in question. It was a noble room, stored with literary treasures of priceless value; for the Avalon library was a family heirloom, and the most famous collection of books and manuscripts in the county.

Randle, with his arm in a sling—wearing a skull cap to conceal the wound on his head, and leaning heavily on a stick, which gave him the appearance of an invalided soldier returning from the wars—pushed open the door and entered. A lady sat in a cozy little chair near the fireplace, bending over a book, in the reading of which she was, or seemed to be, so deeply absorbed that she did not observe the opening of the door, and the soft Turkey carpet on which he trod rendered Randle's footsteps inaudible. Although her back was turned to him, a single glance sufficed to show that the lady was Lady Muriel. There was no mistaking the golden hair, the exquisitely-shaped head, nor the long white arm, destitute of ornament (for Muriel's attire was generally of almost Quaker-like simplicity), which rested on the table by her side.

Randle went nearer—near enough to see that although an open book lay on her knee, and her fingers touched its pages, her thoughts were far away; and, judging by the direction of her glance, she seemed to be intent rather on watching the flickering flames of the fire than studying her author.

"Good morning, Lady Muriel," said Red Ryvington, softly.

"You, Mr. Ryvington!" exclaimed the girl, with a start that threw the book into the fender and almost made a holocaust of it. "Oh, how imprudent! The doctor told papa this morning that you must stay in bed at least till Saturday, and here you are downstairs."

"And feeling all the better for it. My aches seem to have left me already. I can rest downstairs quite as well as up, and you have no idea how much pleasanter it is."

"But standing is not resting. You must sit down at once—here, in this *fauteuil*."

And Muriel with her own hands wheeled up the easiest

arm-chair in the room, placed a rest for his foot, and commanded him peremptorily to sit down, a command which Randle was nothing loth to obey.

He was hardly seated when his letters were brought in; but, as he could not use his right hand, he was obliged to ask Lady Muriel's help to open them.

"How will you answer them?" she asked, when the opening was finished and the reading was done.

"Really, I don't know," said Randle, "unless I engage a private secretary. Is there anybody you can recommend for the post?"

"Will you deign to accept me as your private secretary, Mr. Ryvington?" returned Muriel, with a smile, yet very earnestly. "I have often acted as papa's amanuensis, and I like writing letters."

"You are very kind. I accept your offer with pleasure. But we must settle the terms, you know. What salary do you require? Don't be afraid of asking, for whatever you ask I will give."

"I ask you not to make absurd suggestions, then. I am indebted to you for my life, and yet you talk of rewarding me for writing a few letters for you?" replied Muriel, with an indignation not wholly assumed. "Come, I am ready;" seating herself at a writing table.

Among the letters which had to be answered was one from Kalougia saying that he had heard of a man eminently qualified to act as assistant to Robert during Randle's absence in London. He was a Swiss of the name of Auf der Mauer, whose acquaintance Kalougia had made when he was joinering in the mill at Moscow. He had received a superior education, Kalougia said; was thoroughly conversant with commercial matters and the English language; a good book-keeper; and, from his experience at Moscow, fairly acquainted with factory economy. In short, just the man Randle wanted. Auf der Mauer was presently in the employ of a large house in London, but, not liking the situation, he had written to ask Kalougia if he could find him some more congenial occupation.

"I can answer for his probity and capacity," wrote the Russian, in conclusion, "and as the recommendation comes from me it may not be superfluous to mention that Auf der Mauer, who belongs to a highly respectable Swiss family, is neither a revolutionist nor a member of any secret political society."

"What a strange name!" said Lady Muriel, after she had written Randle's letter in reply, which conveyed a request to Kalougia to tell the man to come to Redscar at once. "Auf der Mauer; that means on the wall."

"Yes, it sounds like a name with a history behind it. I have heard or read somewhere that there are several such quaint designations in Switzerland: Im Thun, Im Busch (in the bush), and so forth, and their owners are as proud of them as if they were titles of nobility. But I am afraid Kalougia's friend will not often get called by his right name at Redscar. He will have to be content with Mauer, or some Lancashire version of it, I think."

Then there was a long talk about Dora and Kalougia, followed by a discussion as to how the letters were to be signed; as to which it was finally agreed, amid some laughter, that the writer should subscribe them "Randle Ryvington, his mark," Randle touching the top of the penholder, while Muriel made the cross which served for his signature. All this took time, and, when the gong sounded the hour of luncheon, the secretary was not more than half through with her work.

"Never mind," she laughed; "we must finish afterwards."

The other members of the family were as much surprised to see Red Ryvington as Muriel had been. The earl appeared pleased that Randle had taken his cure into his own hands. Lord Lindisfarne had a poor opinion of doctors. They were all more or less humbugs, he observed, and Dr. Popjoy was perhaps the biggest humbug of the lot. Nobody seemed surprised that Muriel had helped Randle with his letters. She often helped her father with his, and was considered to possess a particular talent for correspondence.

It thus fell out that the member for Whitebrook and his amateur private secretary were occupied three or four hours every morning in the library; moreover, as Muriel could not very well answer letters without reading them, she soon knew a great deal about Randle's affairs, in which she began to take a lively interest, and between whiles there was necessarily a good deal of conversation. The two learned more of each other's views and characters, likings and dislikings, in a few days of this sort of intercourse than they could have learned in a twelve-month of casual meetings "in society." It was fortunate, from this point of view, that Randle's arm was an unconscionably long time in getting well. Long after his head was healed, and he had ceased to limp, he complained of the aching of his arm and the weakness of his hand, and continued to carry both in a sling. As for Whitebrook, if it had not been for his letters, he might have forgotten it altogether, and only the pleasure he experienced in employing Lady Muriel as his amanuensis induced him to answer them. He watched her closely, and came to have a confident hope that his love was returned. But he shrank from ascertaining the truth. He feared to break the

charm. She might love him, yet not sufficiently to brave the opposition which he anticipated from the family. Now he saw her every day, spent hours with her in the closest intimacy, and the more he saw of her the more did he find in her to admire, and the more indispensable did she become to his happiness. Life without her would not be worth living, he thought, and he knew that the day he declared his love he must either be accepted as the future son-in-law of Lord Lindisfarne or leave Avalon Priory a rejected suitor, probably never to return.

But the time came when the issue could no longer be evaded. A sprained arm is not incurable. Lady Maude smiled sarcastically when she asked Randle if it still pained him, and the countess began to look very dubious when the member for Whitebrook and his charming secretary entered the dining-room at luncheon time after their labours in the library. Randle saw this, and determined to take the final plunge without further pausing on the brink.

The usual procedure, when the business of the day began, was for Muriel to open the letters and hand them to Randle, who sometimes read them aloud, sometimes gave them to his amanuensis to read for herself. One morning, the last on which Muriel was to perform her secretarial duties, there came a letter from Dora. After reading it silently through, Red Ryvington passed the missive to his companion. It was a long gossipy letter, containing nothing of importance except the postscript, which ran thus :—

“ I hope you have given Lady Muriel the *souvenir* with which I charged you.”

“ Really, Mr. Ryvington,” said Muriel, with well-acted indignation, after she had read the letter, “ I must take you to task. Is this *souvenir* something your cousin gave you for me before you left home ? ”

“ It is.”

“ And you have kept it all this time ? ”

“ I have kept it all this time.”

“ You dare to confess it ? What have you to say in arrest of judgment ? ”

“ Nothing. I throw myself on your mercy. I plead guilty, and ask forgiveness for my fault.”

“ On one condition only will I forgive you.”

“ I accept the condition beforehand, whatever it is.”

“ It is that you give me this *souvenir* at once.”

As the words left her lips, Randle, stooping down, touched them with his.

“ Mr. Ryvington ! ” cried Lady Muriel, really surprised, and with a becoming attempt to appear really indignant.

"I most humbly crave pardon, Lady Muriel. But the gift Dora sent was a kiss; and you insisted on having it, you know," said Red Ryvington, with a smile. "I would have given it you sooner if I had dared."

Then he drew her to him and continued in a low, intense voice that trembled with emotion: "Oh, Lady Muriel, Dora divined that I loved you. And the love that was born when I held you in my arms up there in the Furca Pass, as I hold you now, but which, deeming it hopeless, I tried to crush and forget, has revived in full force, and gone on increasing every hour since I came to Avalon. And though you should punish my presumption by never speaking to me again, though I should have to leave your father's house this very day, never to return, I must speak out. Muriel Avalon, you are dearer to me than all the world besides. You are my life, my love, my queen!"

She put her arms round his neck, she raised her beautiful eyes, bright with unshed tears of happiness, to his.

"You say I am your life," she murmured, "who has so much right to it as you have? Did you not save it? And, Randle, dearest, when you saved my life you won my heart. It is yours, and only yours."

Then Randle drew her still closer to him, and kissed her again—this time on his own account.

"But what will your father and mother say?" he asked, after a long, delicious silence. "Will they be for or against?"

"Papa will be for; he likes you. He has little pride of caste, and he could not, if he would, do anything to make me unhappy. But he is greatly influenced by my mother, and she is very proud, and anxious for her daughters to make great matches. Still, I think, with papa on our side, and when she knows that my happiness is at stake, even she will sanction our engagement. Speak to papa first. But whatever comes, Randle, I am yours. Never, never will I be another's."

There were no letters written that morning. The lovers talked of themselves, their hopes and fears. Randle told Muriel how he still cherished, as a precious keepsake, the bunch of forget-me-nots that she had thrown him from the window at Brigue. She told him how she had resolved, in the event of their not meeting again, to live and die a maid, and how she had never for an instant been deceived as to his cousin's identity. She felt, the moment she saw Deep Randle, that he was not the man who saved her life, and when she found that he remembered—or knew—nothing of the conversation on the Furca road, nor of the parting at Brigue, suspicion became certainty.

"I knew from my own heart," she said, "that my Mr. Ryvington (as I always called you to myself) could not have

forgotten what passed between us at that time, so momentous in the lives of both."

When the family met at luncheon the earl invited Randle to go with him to the home farm, where some extensive improvements were in progress; for he had discovered that his guest was a very fair amateur engineer, and that about most practical matters he had valuable ideas. And Randle, reading assent in the eyes of his betrothed, cordially accepted the invitation, which he hoped would afford him an opportunity of telling Lord Lindisfarne what had come to pass.

CHAPTER LV.

WHAT THE EARL SAID.

RANDLE had already discovered that his host, if not a very busy man, had at least a great deal to do. His income, though considerable, was not so large, relatively to his outgoings, that he could afford, even if he had been disposed, to trust the management of his affairs altogether to paid agents. He held frequent consultations with his steward, looked keenly into details, and suffered nothing of importance to be done on any of his estates without his sanction. He acted, in fact, as a man who regards property rather as a trust than a chattel should act. He had, moreover, a large home farm, which when he was at Avalon he visited every day, and virtually managed. With politics Lord Lindisfarne did not much concern himself. He never spoke in Parliament, and thought his duty as a legislator sufficiently discharged by voting with his party on important occasions.

Randle and the earl spent nearly the whole of the afternoon on the home farm. As Ryvington and Sons possessed a home farm of their own, bought by the present proprietor's grandfather, with a view to supplying the Redscar workpeople with pure milk and good butter at reasonable prices, Randle had given some attention to husbandry, and was fairly conversant with the theory and practice of agriculture. There was thus at least one comprehensive subject in which the peer and the cotton spinner took a common interest, and which rendered their companionship mutually agreeable. As, moreover, Lord Lindisfarne was putting up new farm buildings, re-arranging his machinery, and going in for steam cultivation, he took frequent occasion to consult his guest, and profited much by his advice.

It was not until they had set out on their walk homewards

that Red Ryvington, albeit constantly on the watch, found an opportunity of turning the conversation to the subject which lay nearest his heart.

"I am glad you take so much interest in these matters," observed the earl. "I was under the impression that you manufacturers were so occupied with your own special business that you gave little thought to anything else, and least of all to farming."

"Nothing is easier," said Randle, with a smile, "than to get hold of a wrong impression. Before I came to Avalon, for instance, I was under the impression that large landowners led comparatively idle lives, and left the management of their estates to others. But I find that you are almost as fully occupied as myself, and look after your business of land-letting as keenly as I look after mine of cotton manufacturing."

"You are quite right; it is a business. And, when a man lives by the land, the least he can do is to give it his personal attention. A good landlord makes good tenants; that is my experience. I consider it a man's duty to do all he can to secure them, and when he has secured them to keep them. How much land did you say you had on your own hands at Whitebrook?"

"Oh, a mere nothing compared with your home farm. About seventy acres."

"Mostly grass, I suppose?"

"And a few roots. We have tried wheat as an experiment, but it does not answer very well. Oats do better. But ours is essentially a dairy farm."

"You have a good market for your milk and butter, of course."

"So far as demand goes we could not have a better. But we only sell to our own workpeople, and charge them no more than my grandfather used to do fifty years ago—a shilling a pound for butter, twopence a quart for new milk, and when we kill a cow, as sometimes happens, we sell them beef at sixpence."

"Very good of you, I am sure; but how about the result? You must lose heavily."

"Oh dear, no. Our farm account generally balances, and that is all we look for. The prices we get from the hands are, after all, not very much less than many farmers get from the dealers; and we have certain advantages that ordinary farmers do not enjoy. The land was well bought, the interest of it represents a very reasonable rent, it is in excellent condition, and, as the hands fetch their own supplies, we are at no expense for carriage. We might, of course, fairly demand much higher prices; but we like to do all we can in a reasonable way for our

work-people. We live by them as you live by your tenants, and, as a good landlord makes good tenants, so a good master makes good hands; and I do think we have the best set of hands in all Whitebrook, and the most contented."

"I don't wonder they are contented when you let them have beef at sixpence and butter at a shilling a pound," laughed the earl. "Still, I think you are quite right, and I daresay in the long run you lose nothing by your liberality. But to return to our muttons, which in this instance is my farm. When do you think you can draw out that plan which you were good enough to promise me for utilising waste steam for drying hay and corn?"

"Oh, it won't take me long. I will try to do it to-night. As I told you, a fan will be an essential part of the arrangement. Wind dries more than heat, you know."

"It is an excellent suggestion, and I am greatly indebted to you for making it. I wish you were nearer to me, Mr. Ryvington. You are an admirable counsellor."

"I only require your permission, Lord Lindisfarne, to be very much nearer to you."

"Only require my permission to be very much nearer to me!" replied the peer, looking both surprised and puzzled. "Oh, I see" (with the air of a man who feels sure he has hit the right nail on the head); "you like this neighbourhood—everybody likes this neighbourhood—and you want permission to build on my land. By all means; I shall be delighted. Choose any site you like, and——"

"I am going to ask you something far more valuable—to me, at least—than all the land you have, Lord Lindisfarne," interrupted Red Ryvington.

"God bless me! Something far more valuable than all the land I have!" exclaimed the earl, as he turned round and stared his guest full in the face with a more surprised and puzzled look than before. "What can that be?"

"Your daughter, Lady Muriel!"

"Oh, that is it, is it?" said Lord Lindisfarne, drily, as he resumed his walk. "Does Muriel know of this?"

"She does, Lord Lindisfarne. If I had not won her heart I should not have ventured to ask for her hand. I am fully aware of the great disparity in our rank; and Muriel's love, and the fact that her happiness as well as my own is at stake, are my sole excuse for making a request which I fear you will deem very presumptuous, as I acknowledge it is. Yet, if I know myself, Lord Lindisfarne, there is no other ground—none personal to myself, I mean—on which I am unworthy to become her husband and your son-in-law. True, I am not a rich man,

as riches are counted now-a-days. On the other hand, I am not a poor man. My father left me a very fair fortune; and I have already somewhat increased it, and my prospects are good——”

“We will not go into that now, if you please, Mr. Ryvington,” interrupted the earl. “You are a gentleman; you love Muriel, and you would not, I am sure, ask her to marry you unless you had the means of giving her the position which your wife ought to occupy. Personally I have a great regard for you. We all owe you a heavy debt of gratitude, and there is no man of my acquaintance to whom I would more willingly give one of my daughters than yourself. I waive the difference in rank. It exists, but to urge it against you were both ungracious and ungrateful, and I waive it. I am not sure, however, that Lady Lindisfarne will see the matter in the same light, and my consent must be contingent on hers.”

“But, surely, Lord Lindisfarne, if you give your consent the countess will not withhold hers.”

“I am not so sure about that, Mr. Ryvington,” said the earl, with a slight but expressive grimace. “Wives are not always as complaisant with their husbands as might be desired, and as you may suppose. They have opinions of their own sometimes. And the countess had other views for Muriel. She hoped to arrange a marriage for her with Guy Merlin—Lord Mastadon’s eldest son, you know—a distant relative of ours. She might not succeed, it is true; but ladies are apt to mistake their intentions for accomplished facts; they do not always take into account the possibility of failure, and I am afraid she may be rather difficult to manage.”

“Is Muriel acquainted with this project?”

“I do not think so; and I may go so far as to say, Mr. Ryvington, that I will never be a party to forcing a daughter of mine into a marriage which she dislikes.”

“Then I may count on your good offices with Lady Lindisfarne, for I am sure Muriel will never be persuaded to——”

“Marry anybody but yourself,” said the earl, completing the sentence. “I understand. That is a consideration which will doubtless have great weight with the countess—with both of us, in fact. I will talk the matter over with her at once, Mr. Ryvington, and you shall have your answer as soon as possible. But don’t be too confident.”

The earl was wise in making this reservation, for he had a keen recollection of several prior schemes of a domestic if not matrimonial character which, until submitted to the more critical understanding of his wife, seemed to him altogether unexceptionable.

As the two men, who were walking through the park, emerged

from a coppice in the neighbourhood of the Priory, they caught sight of a robed figure in the path before them. It was that of Muriel, whom they shortly overtook. After a few words had been exchanged, Randle, reading in the eyes of his lady-love a wish to be left alone with her father, dropped behind.

"Is this true, Muriel," said the earl, drawing his daughter's arm in his, "that Ryvington has been telling me—that when he saved your life you lost your heart?"

"I don't think he put it quite in that way, papa; but I am sure he told you only the simple truth. I cannot recall the exact moment when—when I lost my heart," said Muriel, firmly, though with downcast eyes; "but I love Randle very, very dearly, and I can never love anybody else."

"Has she heard anything of the Guy Merlin project, I wonder?" thought the peer.

"And when you talk to mother you will tell her so, will you not?" continued Muriel. "She might think otherwise—that I have accepted Randle out of gratitude. But that is not so. I am too grateful, and esteem him too much, to marry him without truly loving him."

"That settles the matter," said Lord Lindisfarne to himself. "She has heard."

After a little further conversation, the earl, who could never refuse his daughters anything, gave his consent to her engagement with Red Ryvington, and undertook (though with a few inward qualms) to make it all right with the countess. He even congratulated Muriel on her choice, and wished her every happiness.

As they entered the house, Randle joined them.

"I am going to speak to Lady Lindisfarne, Randle," said the earl, calling him for the first time by his Christian name. "Perhaps you had better be somewhere about. She may want to speak to you herself, you know."

"We will both be in the library, papa," returned Muriel. "And, papa, dear" (whispering), "do not keep us longer in suspense than you can possibly help."

The earl nodded, and went in search of his countess, and the lovers betook themselves to the library.

Muriel had heard of the Guy Merlin project. Maude, whom she had taken into her confidence, had told her.

"My sister teases sometimes," observed Muriel, "but she is very good. She likes you very much, and quite approves of our engagement. As for Guy Merlin, I do not think that, even if I had never known you, I should have been able to care for him. He is very good, but he has neither ideas nor energy. I have thought sometimes that he is so good because he has not the

energy to do wrong. But whatever he was, dear Randle, I could never love and respect him as I love and respect you."

To so kind a speech there was only one possible answer, and Randle gave it in true loverlike fashion.

"Do you know, dearest," he said, a few minutes later, "that I have had some misgivings about asking you to share my comparatively lowly lot? You will find a great difference. Redscar is not Avalon, and I cannot offer you an establishment even remotely approaching it, either in extent or magnificence."

"You will be at Redscar, won't you?" she asked.

"Except when I am in London."

"And you will let me go with you to London sometimes, will you not?"

Randle swore that they should never be separated for a moment—that wherever he went she should go.

"That is all I ask," she said, with a tender look and a loving caress. "If I am with you I shall be happy, and I shall like Redscar for your sake. You must live your own life, and I shall live it with you. I care no more for grandeur than you do. I mean to look after your work-people and take an interest in all your pursuits. You will let me go with you to your works, and teach me all about electricity and cotton spinning and that, won't you, dearest?"

Red Ryvington, whilst smiling at his lady-sweetheart's simplicity in supposing that he could teach her "all about electricity and cotton spinning and that," and rather doubting if her presence would be altogether favourable either to business or research, declared, as in duty bound, that nothing would afford him greater pleasure than to have her company in his counting house and laboratory all day long.

The conversation had lasted the greater part of an hour, although to the lovers the time seemed much shorter, when the butler, an old fellow who had grown grey in the service of the family, and had a shrewd suspicion which way the wind lay, entered the library, and informed Randle, in a confidential undertone, that Lord Lindisfarne begged the favour of Mr. Ryvington's company in his lordship's room.

CHAPTER LVI.

WHAT THE COUNTESS SAID.

THERE was a look of annoyance on Lord Lindisfarne's good-natured face, and an angry glitter in Lady Lindisfarne's eye, from which Randle inferred that the earl and countess had either come to no resolution whatever, or that their decision was unfavourable to his hopes. They had, in truth, been unable to agree as to the answer which should be given him; for albeit the peer, for the first time in their married life, had declined to be guided by his wife in a purely domestic question, he had not succeeded in persuading her to view the matter as he viewed it, and yield a graceful assent to Randle's suit. She had set her mind on her daughter marrying the Honourable Guy Merlin, who, she was sure, had a liking for Muriel, and she contended that for an Avalon to marry a manufacturer would be something like a degradation. This the earl warmly disputed. A *mesalliance* it might be, but not to an extent that rendered it inadmissible. Similar matches were made every day. If Ryvington had a sister with a fortune of £100,000, he said, the countess would be delighted to accept her as a daughter-in-law. Dukes' sons went into trade now-a-days, and Ryvington, though a manufacturer, was a gentleman and a member of Parliament. He had, moreover, saved Muriel's life, and the earl had Muriel's own word for it that she loved Randle and would marry nobody else.

"Love!" said the countess, impatiently; "say rather a girl's romantic fancy, of which a little firmness would soon cure her. And I am sure Mr. Ryvington would not press a suit which he knew we could not countenance."

"You know better, Eleanor. Muriel is a girl with considerable firmness of character; she possesses a spirit as high as your own, and I am quite sure of this, that, unless she herself dismisses him, Ryvington will never give her up."

In short, Lord Lindisfarne, who had taken a great liking for Randle, and was persuaded that he would make Muriel happy, showed unwonted resolution, and the countess was driven from one point to another until she had nothing to urge save a doubt as to Randle's means. She could not possibly approve, she said, of Muriel engaging herself to a man as to whose pecuniary position they were quite in the dark. To this the earl replied that he believed Ryvington was in easy circumstances and had a good business, and suggested that the doubt could easily be solved by calling Randle in, and letting him give an account of himself.

This was the state of things when Randle appeared on the scene.

The countess, who was before anything a lady, quickly smoothed her ruffled feathers, and waved him urbanely to a seat. After mentioning that she and the earl had been discussing his proposal to Lady Muriel, and remarking on the shortness of their acquaintance and the rapidity of their courtship, to which Randle made a suitable reply, she inquired if he was aware that Muriel had no present fortune, and that, owing to the Lindisfarne property being so strictly settled, the earl would be able to leave her very little at his death.

"I ask for no fortune, Lady Lindisfarne," said Randle, promptly; "and, not only so, I am prepared to make settlements."

"I am glad to hear that," replied the countess, graciously, though her words were not without sting. "Settlements are so necessary, especially when one is exposed to the vicissitudes of business."

"There is not much fear of vicissitudes in our case," was the rather proud answer. "The concern of Ryvington and Sons has been in existence more than a century, and it was never stronger or more likely to endure than at this moment. But I am quite of your opinion, Lady Lindisfarne, that when a man marries it is his duty to make special provision for his wife and those who may become dependent on him. I can settle £20,000 on Lady Muriel for her separate use. Then there is the sum of £10,000 settled by my father on me and my family if I should have any. I shall be further entitled on my mother's death to a moiety of £10,000, my interest in which I propose to include in the settlement. That will make altogether a sum of £35,000, which, well invested, will render us in a great measure independent of the vicissitudes you speak of. As touching business, I may explain that my capital account in the concern (and everything is taken at a very low valuation) stands at something over £70,000. Taking one year with another, my share of the profits will average, I daresay, £7,000, and our profits are more likely to increase than diminish."

"A very satisfactory statement, I am sure. Your frankness merits our warmest thanks, Mr. Ryvington," said the countess, seemingly much gratified. "What do you think now, Reginald?"

"What do I think now?" answered the earl, rather nettled at the apparent imputation that he, not she, had been the spoke in the wheel. "What I have thought from the first, that it is our duty to approve of Muriel's choice, and welcome Mr. Ryvington as her future husband."

"I think the same, and" (offering Red Ryvington her hand) "I wish you and Muriel every happiness, Randle—I shall call you Randle now, you know. She is a dear good girl, and you may well be proud of having won her love. Yours will be a real union of hearts, and such unions, I am sure, offer the best promises of true happiness in married life."

Randle acknowledged her ladyship's compliments and complaisance in fitting terms. He was by no means certain, however, that he owed her much gratitude; he shrewdly suspected that his settlements and his profits had been far more potent in procuring her consent than any merits of his own.

After a little further conversation Randle asked leave to withdraw. He wanted to tell Muriel the good news.

"By all means," said the countess; "and you may bring the child here, Randle. I must not be the last to congratulate her, you know."

Muriel was brought by her lover and congratulated accordingly. Their relation as an engaged couple being thus officially recognised, the *tête-à-têtes* in the library suffered no interruption, their happiness was complete, and everybody seemed content. Randle, it is true, began to hint that it was time he went back to Whitebrook, but his sweetheart did not find much difficulty in persuading him that he could stay just a day or two longer—it was always a day or two—especially as she continued to help him with his correspondence.

But everything has an end. The time arrived when the demands of duty became too imperative to be ignored, and Red Ryvington was compelled to hie him home.

CHAPTER LVII.

EPISCOPAL COUNSEL.

IT came to pass, some ten days after Randle's recognition as Muriel's *fiancé*, that the Bishop of Arnside and the Rector of Avalon were invited to lunch at the Priory. Just as the Right Reverend Father in God concluded saying grace, one of the footmen brought the member for Whitebrook a telegram. Randle laid it on the table.

"Pray open it, Randle. Telegrams are not like letters, they generally require immediate attention," observed the countess, who, woman-like, was burning to know what the message was about.

After reading the despatch Randle handed it to Muriel, who,

on a sign of acquiescence from her lover, passed it across the table to her mother. It was from Bentley, inquiring if it would suit Mr. Ryvington's convenience to be present on the following Saturday at a demonstration, whereby the working men of Whitebrook proposed to celebrate his return to Parliament and the Liberal victory in which they had borne so important a part.

"You will have to accept, I suppose?" said the earl, after he also had perused the message.

"Yes; the invitation is one which I could not well refuse, though I have no great liking for these demonstrations."

"But you will not need to go away until the day after to-morrow," murmured Muriel.

"Not until the night after to-morrow night," returned Randle, in a passionate whisper. "I shall defer my departure to the latest possible moment."

"Ah, the telegram is signed by your *protégé*, Bentley," said the earl. "I was talking to the bishop about him just before we came in to luncheon. Do you think he was right in his opinion that the Whitebrook lads, as he calls them, would throw up their hats for a republic if they thought it would bring them an increase of wages?"

"No. It may be so as regards some, but not, I am sure, as regards the great majority of the Whitebrook work-people. I do not think they can be so cynical. Bentley as a weaver is altogether out of his element. He is dissatisfied. He despises those about him; and the dissatisfied are rarely impartial judges. There is, nevertheless, some truth—more perhaps than we are aware of—in what he said. I remember in my school-days being very much startled by a remark of one of my father's workmen almost to the same effect. Torr, the man in question, was an overlooker, one of the best we had—exceedingly well read and a frequent speaker at teetotal meetings. We were talking about the Napoleonic wars, in the history of which he took a great interest, and I chanced to remark on the eminent services of Nelson and Wellington, and how fortunate it was that Napoleon had been foiled in his design to conquer England.

"'Perhaps you are right in thinking so,' said Torr; 'but I do not see that it has made any great difference to me. Even if Napoleon had conquered England, I daresay I should have been able to earn at least thirty-five shillings a week, and that is all I earn now.'"

"What answer did you make?" inquired the earl.

"To tell the truth, I was so much surprised that there could exist an Englishman who did not feel a pride in his country, and Torr's way of looking at the question was so novel, that I had

literally nothing to say. It was the first glimpse I had ever had into the real mind of an intelligent man of a class lower than my own."

"This Torr was of course a great Radical?" suggested the bishop.

"I do not think he took any part in politics whatever. It was before the last Reform Bill, and he had no vote."

"At any rate he was an infidel."

"On the contrary, he was a religious man and an active Sunday-school teacher."

"A Dissenter, then?"

"Yes, Torr was a Dissenter."

"Ah, I thought there was something. No Church-bred man could possibly entertain such sentiments."

"Unfortunately for your theory, Bishop, Torr was a Church-bred man. He became a chapel-goer only because a clergyman whom he loved was succeeded by one who did not win his confidence—perhaps because he never tried."

"How, then, can you account for a man so well off for an artisan, and so exceptionally intelligent as this Torr, being so devoid of patriotic feeling?"

"May not his lack of patriotism have been in some measure due to his superior intelligence? Patriotism, I take it, is a good deal a question of property. If all of us here were reduced to the condition of farm labourers and factory operatives, and our lives were one continual struggle for existence, I do not think we should display much public spirit. If we were unlearned, and believed our catechisms, we might perhaps accept our fate as a dispensation of Providence. If we had a little education, and were therefore more or less sceptical, we should probably begin by doubting that this was the best of possible worlds, and end by being desperately discontented and frightfully unpatriotic, like Bentley and Torr."

"You think, then, that education has a tendency to make the lower orders discontented?"

"Under certain conditions I do. Look at Germany. There is no country in the world where education is more widely disseminated, none in which Socialism is more rampant."

"Ah," said the bishop, gravely, "Socialism, I fear, is the great danger of the future. There is only one remedy for it—religion."

"I do not say you are not right," rejoined Randle. "But how are you to apply the remedy? Working men, as a rule, go neither to church nor chapel. The other day I had a sort of religious census taken at Redscar, from which it appears that of the adult men in our employ not more than one in forty attend

any place of worship whatever, and I daresay it is pretty much the same through all the manufacturing districts."

"But surely this is a terrible state of things, Ryvington," observed the earl. "If you are right, the advocates of education are all wrong, and it would have been better to leave the masses in blissful ignorance."

"I am not sure that it was blissful," returned Randle, "and I do not think you could have kept them ignorant. The masses had learnt enough to want to know more; and they are in the majority, recollect."

"What is to be done, then, to conjure this evil of Socialism, which I agree with the bishop is the great danger of the future?"

"I am afraid that is a question which is beyond my power to answer, Lord Lindisfarne. My friend Kalougia will have it that all Europe has entered on a process of social evolution which will go on until what he calls the redemption of the disinherited is achieved. But I have great faith in individual effort and common-place expedients. We must try to broaden the basis of society by reinforcing the ranks of the 'haves' and diminishing the number of the 'have nots,' by encouraging thrift and providing facilities for the profitable investment of savings. If I were a great landowner, for instance, I would give every labourer on my estate the chance of taking, at a fair rent and on a long lease, a small plot of land sufficient, say, to keep a cow and grow a few vegetables, and quicken his energies by securing to him the value of his improvements."

"By way of giving him a stake in the country, I suppose; and what would you recommend great manufacturers to do? What is sauce for the landowner should be sauce for the mill-owner, you know."

"A very fair retort," laughed Red Ryvington. "Well, in most parts of Lancashire factory operatives have already chances which farm labourers are far from enjoying. A saving man may acquire a share in a mill, and if he prefers a steady interest to a fluctuating profit the joint-stock companies will take his money on deposit at four or five per cent. I am not sure, however, that the Oldham system is the best possible, yet it is a good beginning, and we can only arrive at satisfactory results by going through an exhaustive series of failures. The worst of the joint-stock plan is that it encourages speculation, and leads sometimes to chicanery and disaster. I have been trying lately to think out a scheme for enabling the thrifty among our hands to participate in the profits of the concern without exposing them to the risk of loss, or encouraging them to speculate, but I do not quite see my way yet."

"Do you intend to treat on these topics in your speech at the Whitebrook demonstration?" asked the earl, as he and the bishop rose from the table.

"I do not think so. They are rather subjects for a quiet lecture than a demonstration. I must leave social questions aside this time, and go in for practical politics."

"Take my advice, Mr. Ryvington," said the bishop, "and leave social questions aside, not only this time but at all times. As I have remarked, I regard Socialism as one of the great dangers of the future; but that is no reason why we should bring it nearer by talking about it. There is no safer rule for a public man than to let awkward subjects alone as long as he can. Depend upon it, that is one great secret of success both in Church and State."

CHAPTER LVIII

RED RYVINGTON MAKES A SPEECH AND DEEP RYVINGTON A SUGGESTION.

BEFORE Randle left the Priory it was decided that the marriage should take place towards the close of the London season and in London. It could not well take place sooner. It would be impossible for the member for Whitebrook to absent himself from his Parliamentary duties in the middle of the session, and he could not, for several months to come, conveniently provide the £20,000 he had engaged to settle on Muriel.

Muriel hinted a desire that their honeymoon might be spent in Switzerland. She had conceived a romantic wish to revisit, in Randle's company, the scene of their first memorable meeting, a desire with which Randle was of course only too happy to promise compliance.

She drove with him to the station.

"Be sure to send me a paper containing a report of your speech," she said, before they parted. "I agree with all you said when the bishop was here. We are too much wrapped up in ourselves, and think more of the interests of our order than the welfare of the community. I will try to help you in your schemes, dearest. We will work together. And now promise me one thing: you must speak in the House."

"When I have anything to say that is worth listening to, I will."

"Then you will speak very often," returned Muriel, confidently, as if it were quite out of the question that her lover could possibly say anything not worth listening to.

"And give my love to your mother and cousin; and you can tell Dora that I received her present with much surprise——"

"And pleasure," suggested Randle, roguishly.

"Certainly not, Mr. Ryvington. With much surprise and indignation—be sure you do not forget the indignation. And" (smiling) "you may take the present back to her. I decline to keep it."

It is hardly necessary to say that Randle did take it back, and something more.

A few minutes later Muriel was riding homeward through the fast deepening twilight, full of sweet thoughts, sad at parting with her lover, yet not unhappy; for in less than a fortnight they would meet in London, and his absence would be rendered tolerable by the daily letters which he had promised to send her.

For some time after Red Ryvington left Avalon his mind, as was natural, ran mainly on Muriel and on the strange fortune which had made him the betrothed husband of Lord Lindisfarne's daughter. His thoughts went back to the very beginning of their acquaintance—to the fateful call of the bells as he lay sleeping in the Furca Pass—to his first sight of Muriel, as she stood up, terror-stricken, in the doomed carriage—to the terrace at Brigue and the withered bunch of forget-me-nots. He dwelt fondly on every incident, of their courtship, from his declaration in the library to their parting at Avalon. He could still see her as she stood, "beautiful and bright," waving her last adieux; and the fortnight which was to elapse before he could see her again seemed to him of portentous length. But even a lover's day-dream cannot last for ever, and as sober reason resumed her sway his reverie became a little less rose-coloured, and, as if to remind him that here below there is no such thing as unalloyed happiness, the shadow of a cloud came to mar the perfection of his joy.

He began to fear that, in promising to settle £20,000 on Muriel prior to their marriage, he might possibly have promised more than he could perform consistently with his duty to the concern. A month or two previously he had arranged for the erection of another mill which would involve a considerable outlay, and this, in addition to the £20,000, might be more than the concern could conveniently spare, and conduct its operations on the firm's traditional principles of taking no credit and incurring no debts. If things went well—if profits continued fairly good and orders plentiful—he anticipated no difficulty; yet there was always the off-chance that they might not, and the contingency rather troubled him; for he felt certain that, if the money were not forthcoming, Lady Lindisfarne's consent, and probably Lord Lindisfarne's, would be withdrawn.

Randle found his mother, whom he had informed of his engagement only the day before his return, in a tremor of mingled delight and dismay, delight that her son had formed so brilliant a connection, dismay at the idea of becoming mother-in-law to an earl's daughter. But after Randle had described Muriel's character (of course making her out to be only a little lower than an angel) she was greatly comforted, and came to the conclusion that they would be sure to get on very well together. Mrs. Ryvington could not, however, bring herself to view the financial part of the arrangement with entire approval. It did not seem to her in accordance with the fitness of things that the money should all come "from their side;" and Lord Lindisfarne's inability to dower his daughter greatly lowered that nobleman—and the aristocracy generally—in her estimation. If she had spoken her mind (which, out of consideration for her son's feelings, she discreetly refrained from doing) she would probably have said that, how great soever might be the honour of an alliance with the house of Avalon, Randle would have acted more wisely had he chosen a young lady of his own rank, "with a nice fortune," rather than a peer's daughter whose portion had to be provided by the concern.

As for Dora, she was overjoyed beyond measure at the turn things were taking. She demanded of her cousin if she had not proved herself a true witch, and privately informed Kalougia that it was she who had made the match. When Randle informed her that Muriel returned her souvenir, she laughingly told him to present her with another of the same sort, "which I warrant she will keep," said Dora. Randle of course promised compliance, and took charge of the commission on the spot.

The working men's demonstration was a great success, and Red Ryvington, as he had agreed, sent to Lady Muriel a report of his speech, which greatly pleased her. One passage of it especially struck her. It caused, also, some sensation among his constituents.

It happened that one of the speakers by whom he was preceded, a certain Mr. Thoroughpin, had much to say about "the overweening power of the aristocracy and our never-ending struggle with the landed interest." Of this speech it was hardly possible for Randle to avoid taking some notice; but, contrary to general expectation, instead of applauding he held it up as a warning.

"It is a great mistake," he observed, "to confound words with things, to continue a cry after it has ceased to possess a meaning. I am not aware that now, whatever may have been the case in the past, the aristocracy—by which I suppose is meant great landowners—exercise a predominant influence in this

country. It appears to me that in this sense a great manufacturer or a great ironmaster is just as much an aristocrat as a great landowner, whether titled or untitled. Capital is always a power, and the chief difference between them is, that while the capital of one class is invested in land, the capital of the other is invested in buildings, machinery, and stock in trade. One privilege only a landowner possesses that a millowner does not enjoy; if the former mismanages his business he comes to grief and his property passes into more competent hands, while, so far as the majority of millowners are concerned, a like cause does not produce a like effect. This is the result of a law equally unwise and unjust, which I hope will soon be repealed. All classes, as classes, are selfish, and prefer their own interest to the interest of the State; but, owing to the operation of causes which I do not propose on this occasion to discuss, there is no government in existence, save, perhaps, that of Switzerland, so free from class influence as that of England. You have not here, as they have in the United States, whole industries levying blackmail on the community, and protected from competition at the cost of the commonwealth. These are aristocracies if you will, and where they exist there can be no real freedom. After all, the difference between one capitalist class and another is as nothing compared with the difference between those who possess capital and those who possess none—between landowner and labourer, manufacturer and artisan. But this is a subject which cannot be advantageously discussed at the fag end of a speech. I will content myself now with suggesting to my friend, Mr. Thoroughpin, that it is not our mission as Liberals to combat this or that interest or class, but to convince public opinion. If we can do that we shall win, and, though every aristocrat, millocrat, and plutocrat in the realm be against us, our views will prevail. If we fail in this, we shall fail in all, even if every one of us were aced up to the lips, and consoled up to the chin."

When, a few days later, the *Morning Post* and several society papers announced that a marriage had been arranged between the senior member for Whitebrook and one of Lord Lindisfarne's daughters, Mr. Thoroughpin (who had a keen recollection of the way in which he had been taken down a peg at the demonstration), and a few others of Randle's supporters, shook their heads in a portentous fashion and opined that he had found a Delilah at Avalon, and that his Radical locks had been shorn by a woman of the aristocracy. But the majority of his constituents were decidedly pleased. They looked upon his betrothal to an earl's daughter as reflecting credit on the town. It was regarded as being equal in that respect to the winning of the Trafalgar Cup by Deep Ryvington's greyhound, Fleetfoot; and there was a

general feeling that Whitebrook was rising in the world. When the story (graphically written and slightly embellished) of his first meeting with Muriel found its way into the local paper (Randle could never tell how, but he strongly suspected Dora of having furnished the facts and suggested the article), the Whitebrookers were more delighted still, and the new member's popularity, especially with the fair sex, became greater than ever. They looked upon him as a hero of romance, and he received daily applications—sometimes from buxom factory lasses in person—for photographs of Lady Muriel and himself.

All this, as may be supposed, was gall and wormwood to Mr. Ryvington of Deepdene. When asked about his cousin's approaching marriage, as he often was, he could hardly command himself sufficiently to refrain from insulting his questioner.

"I know nothing either of my cousin or his concerns," was his stereotyped answer on these occasions, given with a curtness that showed how unpleasant he found the subject.

"You have not been wide awake this time, Ryvington," said Tom Cliviger, the first time he saw his friend after the news had become the town's talk. "What have you been doing to let your cousin kale [get before] you in this fashion? Why didn't you put up for one of Lord Lindisfarne's daughters?"

This observation was not without intention, for the yarn agent had a shrewd suspicion of the truth, and felt somewhat annoyed that Deep Ryvington had not made a confidant of him.

"Confound my cousin," exclaimed the other, furiously. "He's always kaling me. I wish he was far enough. I wish he had never been born. I wish he was dead, and I was trampling on his grave. I say, Tom, if you can put a spoke in his wheel—do him an ill-turn—anything, in fact, to take the shine out of him and stop his marriage.—I'll—I'll refuse you nothing. I'll pay any sum that you like to name."

"Wild talk, Ryvington," said the yarn agent, smiling at this outburst of impotent rage. "How can I put a spoke in your cousin's wheel?"

"I don't know. Get him into a bad speculation and ruin him."

"Get Randle into a bad speculation! I should like to see anybody try. It would take a sharper fellow than me, or you either, to do that. You may not like your cousin, but you cannot say he's a fool."

"But Bob is. At any rate he is conceited, impulsive, and inexperienced, and when his brother goes to London he'll be left in charge, you know. Try to let him in for something. It will do as well. I'll make it worth your while all the same."

The yarn agent smiled again, shrugged his shoulders, and

changed the subject. He had nothing against Red Ryvington, and did not feel in the least disposed to make himself the instrument of Deep Randle's revenge. The risk would be great, and the advantage doubtful; for, although the squire of Deepdene made large promises, there was no security for their fulfilment. A contract to ruin a man cannot be reduced to writing and enforced by a lawsuit.

The suggestion, nevertheless, sank deep into Oliviger's mind, and was destined to bear evil fruit. He had formed a very decided opinion as to the future course of the cotton market. He thought prices would rise, and wanted to make a combination, or ring, for buying heavily and holding largely. But he lacked the means to put "the big pot on" unaided; and the friends whose help he could command were not especially strong in the matter of credit. But if he could persuade Ryvington and Sons, a house whose word was as good as their bond, and whose bond was as good as bank notes, to join the operation, he might carry it out on almost any scale he liked. At any rate, he thought so. He knew quite well that any proposal of the sort laid before Randle would meet with contemptuous rejection. But Randle was going to London, and his brother, as Deep Ryvington had observed, was young, impulsive, and inexperienced. Bob might perchance be "hooked in," thought the yarn agent; and before the day was over he had made up his mind to "try it on." He knew himself to be gifted with considerable powers of persuasion, and he concluded that, on the whole, the odds were in his favour.

CHAPTER LIX.

RED RANDLE DOES NOT COME HOME.

THE fortnight that passed between his return from Avalon and his departure for London was a busy time for Red Ryvington. His first and most pressing duty was to reorganise the management of the business and take such measures as might most effectually ensure its well-being during the period of his absence, an absence that, with a few short intervals, would probably extend over several months. Next in importance came the arrangements connected with his cousin's marriage, which was to take place in a few days. Dora's choice of him as one of the trustees under her settlement involved frequent consultations with Kalongia and Mr. Pleasington, and much reading of legal documents. His accession to the House of Commons had greatly increased his private correspondence, and he allowed nothing to hinder him

writing his daily letter to Muriel. One way and another, Randle at this time, to use a Lancashire phrase, was uncommonly "throng," and had quite as many irons in the fire as he could keep hot.

He found that he had done a good thing in engaging Kaulougia's friend, Auf der Mauer—how good a thing the Swiss was to learn later. So far as appearance went, he did not at all answer to the ideal Randle had formed of him. Instead of a rather dried up specimen of a middle-aged clerk, with formal manner and a foreign air, Auf der Mauer was under thirty and looked younger. He had an almost round face, dark hair, and keen grey eyes, while his rich complexion and stalwart limbs showed that the man was mountain bred. But there was not much of rustic simplicity about him. He had received an excellent education at the Polytechnicum of Zurich, and, besides his experience in Russia, he had served a mercantile apprenticeship at Hamburg and Havre, and passed several months in a London financial establishment of the first rank. He spoke English well, and wrote it better; he excelled both as a book-keeper and correspondent; and, after half-an-hour's talk with him, Randle decided to place Auf der Mauer at the head of the office department of the concern, and agreed to give him the salary he asked—high though it was—without demur. He was to take entire charge of the accounts and correspondence, and furnish Randle with an elaborate weekly report of sales and purchases, payments and receipts, consumption and production—of everything, in short, that it behoved the head of a business to know, who meant, though at a distance, to keep the reins in his own hands. Robert, assisted by two or three of the senior overlookers, was to take the technical direction of the concern, and attend the Liverpool and Manchester markets. The only counting-house work that his brother requested him to undertake was the signing of cheques, and the custody of the bank-book, duties which, in accordance with the traditional usage of the firm, Randle had hitherto himself performed. But he would have done better, as he had eventually bitter reason to know, if he had included these also in Auf der Mauer's avocations. In the event of Bob's absence, the Swiss was to take the supreme command.

These arrangements made, Randle thought he might go to London and attend to his parliamentary duties, and devote himself to Muriel, with a quiet mind. He would be able to control the business, except as to details, almost as effectively as if he were at Redscar, whither (besides running down to Manchester two or three times a week) he intended to make frequent flying visits. The possibility that anything could go seriously wrong without its coming forthwith to his knowledge hardly so much as occurred to him. It was a source of further satisfaction to Randle

that Kalougia had undertaken to continue the electrical experiments and keep him well advised as to the progress he might make. The Russian intended also to give a portion of his time to the healing art ; but exclusively among the poor, and gratuitously.

Two days after Dora's marriage, Red Ryvington left Redscar for the metropolis.

It required only a short experience of life in London to show him that every moment of his time would be occupied, and that his visits to Lancashire were likely to be few and far between. Parliament alone kept him well employed ; for, having a high ideal of duty, he desired to discharge faithfully the trust conferred upon him by his constituents. The epoch, moreover, was a history-making one, and questions of great moment in which he took a deep interest were to the fore. Then he had to write almost daily letters to Whitebrook and Manchester, and the study of *Auf der Mauer's* weekly reports, and the correspondence arising therefrom, made further heavy drafts upon his time. All this he had anticipated ; he had also counted on making frequent visits to the Lindisfarne mansion in Grosvenor Square, and spending any leisure moments he might be able to command in the society of his *fiancée*. But what he had not counted on were the social calls which his friendship with the Avalons brought upon him. How could he refrain from going to the opera when he knew Muriel was going ? How refuse an invitation to a party at which he knew she was to be present ? And invitations were showered upon him to an extent that made the mere answering of them burdensome. For the story of the adventure in the Furca Pass had found its way from the obscure Whitebrook journal in which it first appeared, *viâ* Manchester, to London, and a London paper famous for its encyclopedic learning and the splendour of its diction, made the incident the subject of a leading article in which the member for Whitebrook was eulogised for his courage, and Lady Muriel Avalon, after having been complimented on her beauty, was praised for her spirit, " in rising superior to the conventional distinctions of mere rank and the shallow sophistries of fashion, and bestowing her hand where she had given her heart."

About the same time Randle, greatly to Muriel's satisfaction, made a speech which attracted some attention. True, it was not much of a speech, nor the subject to which it related of great importance. But it was one which Red Ryvington thoroughly understood. He spoke briefly, and to the point, and as he ventured to express approval of a Government measure which the majority of his party condemned, the minister complimented him on his independence, and declared his intention of profiting by several of the "valuable suggestions which the honourable member for Whitebrook had been good enough to make."

Although Lady Lindisfarne was much pleased with her future son-in-law's growing celebrity (it seemed to make the match less of a *mésalliance*) she strongly objected to the article in the *Penny Trumpet*; for the writer thereof, doubtless with a view to rhetorical effect, had somewhat exaggerated the difference in rank between Lady Muriel and her lover.

"To read it," said the countess, "you might suppose that Mr. Ryvington was a low-born factory operative, whereas he is a gentleman by birth and education."

In speaking of Randle's means, it pleased her ladyship to make an ingenious use of that convenient but misleading word "about." Mr. Ryvington's income, she said, was "about" £10,000 a year, and the settlement he proposed to make about £40,000.

In this there was probably no conscious exaggeration, for there are sanguine souls in the world who look upon £7,000 as very little short of £10,000, and regard an eventual £35,000 as almost equivalent to a present £40,000. Stories, especially when they concern money, never lose in the telling; and before Randle had been many weeks in London rumour credited him with a fixed income of £20,000 a year, and the possession of a large amount of ready money. The result of his reputation for wealth, of his celebrity as the hero of a romantic adventure, and a rising member of Parliament was so great a multiplication of his engagements that he found it quite out of the question to make any visits either to Manchester or Whitebrook. He might, it is true, have occasionally gone thither between Saturday and Monday, but Sunday (when he sometimes lunched and invariably dined at Grosvenor Square) was precisely the only time when he had the opportunity of enjoying a quiet *tête-à-tête* with his lady love—and love won the day. Yet not always without a struggle, for almost every Monday morning Randle vowed to himself that he really would run down to Redscar on the following Saturday. But as the week wore out his resolution wore with it, and Sunday found him again at Grosvenor Square. And no wonder. Those Sundays were Elysium. What joy to accompany Muriel to church, to watch her as she bent over her Bible, to sit near her and kneel beside her! Never in all his life before had Randle been so devoted a church-goer. And then the hour—often extended to two—they were permitted to spend together in one of the drawing-rooms, the evening hymn which they always sang together before parting, the last embrace, the walk home with the savour of a kiss still lingering on his lips, the feeling as if Muriel's arms were still around him, and the indescribable elation arising from a sense of requited love—how was it possible to exchange delights like these for Redscar and business?

Nevertheless, Randle's conscience was not free from reproach. Nobody knew better than he how difficult, or, rather, how impossible it is to control a large business entirely by correspondence, and even his business correspondence was beginning to suffer from the pressure of his social and political engagements. He could not blind himself to the fact that he was leaving the management of his affairs too much to others, that he was letting the reins slip from his hands; and it was often, as his mother would have said, borne on his mind that he was failing in his promise to his father to make the interest of the concern his chief care. But he consoled himself with the reflection that the session would not last for ever, and that after his marriage he could give the whole of his time and attention for several consecutive months to the business of the firm. And all seemed to be going on so well. Auf der Mauer's weekly reports were satisfactory; there was no cloud in the commercial sky; profits, though not brilliant, were fair; and he would be able, without strain, to raise the £20,000 for Muriel's settlement.

Yes, all seemed to be going on well; so well, indeed, that when the Easter recess came, Randle, who had resolved to spend it at Redscar, changed his purpose and went with the Avalons to Brighton.

CHAPTER LX.

DORA HAS NEWS.

WHILE he was at Brighton Red Ryvington was further reassured by a letter from his mother, in which she said that, so far as she could ascertain, all was well with the business. True, she added, the burden seemed almost too much for Robert, and that he was looking rather pale and anxious. But this Randle attributed to his mother's inveterate pessimism. She was quite capable of seeing signs of anxiety where none existed, and as for the qualification, "so far as she could ascertain," that was nothing, for Mrs. Ryvington rarely, if ever, committed herself to a positive statement. If his mother could say that "all was well" all must be well, so Randle wrote her a comforting letter, laughed at her fears, and promised, as usual, to make an early visit to Redscar.

Mrs. Ryvington was nevertheless very uneasy, and her son's letter did not console her much. It did not seem to her in accordance with the fitness of things that the head of a business should rule it altogether from a distance, and never before had the

active management been entrusted to a stranger and a lad only just of age. But she never complained, not even to Dora, and, with one exception, scrupulously kept her own counsel. She sometimes relieved her mind by talking to Lydia Fulshaw, but the old woman had been a faithful friend and retainer of the Ryvington family for three generations, and was as close as the grave.

Lydia was very old—how old she could never be induced to tell. Her husband had been an overlooker at Redscar in the time of Randle's grandfather, and, in consideration of his services and her merits, the firm had voted her, more than thirty years before, a small but sufficient pension. In her younger days Mrs. Fulshaw had been a woman of such strong personality that her name was given by common consent to her progeny, and even to her husband. As often as not he was called "owd Lyddy's mon," sometimes even "owd Lyddy;" while her children were invariably spoken of as "Jack, Bob, Ben, Mary, and Sally o' Lyddy's," as the case might be. As Lydia was a notable housewife and an excellent nurse, her services (before she became too infirm to render them) were always acceptable at the hall and the house on the occasion of a birth or a death, or whenever her help could be useful. She had thus acquired an intimate knowledge of the past history of the family; and Red Randle's father, and Randle himself, always enjoyed a talk with Mrs. Fulshaw about old times.

Three or four times a month Lydia paid Mrs. Ryvington a visit, when she was received in that lady's own room, for their talk was often of a confidential sort, and it was the custom on these occasions to allow the poor old body the solace of a glass of gin and a pipe (borrowed from the coachman). Mrs. Ryvington did not care much for gin, but she generally took a drop to keep her visitor in countenance, and always gave her a little in a bottle to take home with her.

On an afternoon several weeks subsequently to Randle's trip to Brighton his mother and her ancient guest were enjoying their usual gossip with its usual accompaniments.

"My mind misgives me much, Lydia," Mrs. Ryvington was saying. "They say all is well with the business, but Mr. Randle has been away five months—five months, and never once come near—and Robert looks more anxious than I like. I do hope there's nothing wrong."

"Why should you be anxious, Mrs. Ryvington? Young folks will be young folks, you know," answered Lydia, who, though an excellent listener, was not as quick of apprehension as she used to be, besides being a little hard of hearing. "Mr. Randle is only having his fling a bit in London. He'll settle down when

he gets wed, you see if he doesn't. That is the way with the Ryvingtons—they always settle down when they get wed."

"But my son Randle has always been so steady and attentive to business," returned Mrs. Ryvington, rather nettled at the suggestion that Randle was "having his fling," a term which in Whitebrook signified drink and dissipation. "He never gave me a heartache in his life, dear lad—until—until now."

"Ay, ay, I daresay. But I never knew a Ryvington yet as didn't have his fling i' one shape or another. It may be drink or it may be lasses. One or t'other it's sure to be—unless it's both. Ay, ay, I mind me well when th' young mayster" (Red Ryvington's grandfather) "left school and began to go about th' factory. There were fine carryings on, there wor that. When any of us had brewed, he liked nowt better than to come down wi' two or three of th' chaps and sup all th' brew. He was a rare un, the young mayster was" (gleefully, as she took a sip of her gin), "a rare un for spreeing and a rare un for work. There never was his marrow on Redscar ground. You should ha' seen when the top rasevoy [reservoir] burst, and broke into th' bottom spinning-room—how he waded i' th' watter, ay, and swum, and wrought and wrought to that end till he welly got his death. But he got into a scrape at last as made th' owd mayster insist on his getting wed, and wedding cured him. He had been into th' town one Saturday night and taken a sup too much, and when he wakened up next morning, soon after five, he clean forgot as it wor Sunday morning and wondered why th' factory bell did not ring. It was a word and a blow wi' th' young mayster, and th' idea had no sooner come into his head than he up an' rung th' bell hissell; and he went on ringing it welly [nearly] twenty minutes, till James—that was my husband—run down to th' factory and stopped him. And then there was a bonny do. Folks came running fro' all th' country side, three fire engines came galloping fro' Whitebrook, and five or six from other places. And folks kept coming all day; for it got out as th' Redscar factories had all getten burnt down. We made it up to say as it was our James—as he had rung th' bell in a mistake when he was a bit th' worse for liquor. But, bless you, nobody believed us. Everybody knew it wor th' young mayster. Th' owd mayster and th' owd missus wor fearful angry, as you may well suppose; and they were that shamed as they could not face up at church for a month or more. Th' owd mayster went fair stamping mad; and he said as if the young mayster didn't get a wife fust thing, and behave hissell, he'd have nowt more to do wi' him. And he did. Three months after he was wed to Miss Strangeways fro' Garsden—your husband's mother, ma'am, and fro' that day forrard he was steady as a growing tree. Take my advice, Mrs.

Ryvington, and get Mr. Randle wed; he'll never settle down gradely till he does. Why don't he and that young lady as he's courting buckle to? I've never known much good come o' waiting when a lad and a lass is of one mind. I've known ill come of it. Get 'em married as soon as you can, ma'am."

"They have to be married in less than three months, Lydia, all being well, and very thankful I shall be when the time comes. I never could have believed that Randle could be so bitten by a girl as he is by Lady Muriel, for I am afraid it is she more than his Parliament work that keeps him so much in London. It will be a mercy if no harm comes of it. No business can long prosper when the head is away, and the burden is too heavy for Robert; I am sure it is. Don't you think Robert is looking very pale and anxious, Lydia?"

"May I come in, please?" was the rather singular response to Mrs. Ryvington's query; but it did not come from Mrs. Fulshaw; the speaker was Dora, who, without waiting for an answer to her question, walked into the room, and, after kissing her aunt, shook hands cordially with Mrs. Fulshaw.

"What! Drinking gin again, Lydia!" she exclaimed, jestingly. "How dreadful! Don't you know that it's slow poison!"

"Yes, I'm drinking gin again, Mrs. Kalougia," said the old woman, slowly, as she stirred the mixture with her spoon; "and I am smoking a pipe o' baccy as your aunt has got for me fro' th' coachman; and I drink a drop o' gin and smoke a pipe every day. I'm a lone woman now, and they are th' only comforts as I have left, Mrs. Kalougia; and if so be as you lose your husband and get to my time of life, you'll find a drop——"

"Don't say any more, Lydia—please don't," cried Dora, horrified by the suggestion that, whatever time of life she might get to, she could possibly find consolation for her husband's death in gin-and-water and tobacco. "I was only teasing, you know. I'm sure a glass now and again does you good. Dr. Kalougia says that old people really require a little stimulant, and I sent a bottle of port wine yesterday to old Jenny Tasker. She has been rather ailing lately, and my husband prescribes for her."

"Ay, I yerd on it. You sent it by Harry o' owd Matt's, did not you?"

"Yes, I think that is the name they give him—Jenny's son-in-law, you know."

"Ay; but Jenny has never clapped her e'en [eyes] on that port wine yet. Harry supped it all afore he got home—every drop on it."

"Oh, the wretch!" exclaimed Dora, indignantly. "I never heard of anything so wicked. And he actually said how grateful they all were for our kindness, and how careful they would be of

the wine, and give Jenny just two small glasses a day; and I told him to fetch another bottle in a week."

"Oh, he'll foch it; there's no fear o' that," said Lydia, with a grin. "Harry o' owd Matt's would go to th' world's end in his barefoot feet for a ballyful o' red port."

"He will get no more from me, at any rate, the sot. I will either take the next to old Jenny myself or send it by one of the servants. And when Harry the son of Matt comes, as I suppose he will, I shall give him a good talking to, and try to bring him to a sense of the enormity of his conduct."

"Ay, ay; you may talk as much as you like," muttered Lydia, "but Harry will sup red port whenever he can get howd on it, for all that."

"Never mind about Harry of old Matt's now. What news have you brought, Dora?" put in Mrs. Ryvington, rather impatiently, for she inferred from the time and manner of her niece's visit that Mrs. Kalougia had come to tell her something.

"News that will surprise you, aunt. It never rains but it pours, you know, and this morning Sergius had news from Siberia and St. Petersburg, and I had news from London. I will begin with my news. My brother has found a wife at last, or rather a lady who is willing to be his wife—a lady of title, I mean."

"Indeed! And who is she?"

"The Dowager Lady Conacre."

"She is an old woman, then?"

"Oh, dear no. At any rate, Randle says she is not more than five-and-twenty, and very good-looking. A dowager must be a widow, of course; but widows are not always old, you know. That is all my brother says about her. He could hardly say less, and I have written to the other Randle to find out what sort of a person she is. I hope for my brother's sake she is really a lady, and will make him a good wife."

"Ay, ay," mumbled Mrs. Fulshaw, who seemed to be disposing herself for a short snooze. "Get him wed; no mon is good for much till he gets wed, 'specially if he be a Ryvington."

"Well, I am very sorry," said Mrs. Ryvington, with a sigh.

"Sorry for whom, aunt?" returned Dora, with a smile.

"For my brother, or for Lady Conacre?"

"I am sorry because your brother will get all the estate. Nothing can prevent him now, I am afraid."

"Oh, that does not trouble me at all, aunt. I gave up the estate long ago—in intention—and quite finally when I married Sergius. Indeed I have enjoyed half the income much longer than I expected. I am quite content, I assure you."

"Do you really think he will keep it all—that he will give you no part of it?"

"I think it is very likely. He is very fond of money, and he thinks the estate is his by right. The marriage is to take place soon, he says, and he wants Sergius and me to go to the wedding; but I am not sure that we shall be able."

"Why?"

"Because we are very likely going to St. Petersburg."

"Going to St. Petersburg! Oh, Dora, surely not!" exclaimed Mrs. Ryvington, in a tone of unfeigned horror.

"Only for a visit, aunt; not for good," said Dora, smiling at her aunt's dismay, "Sergius has had a letter from his brother. The Tsar has pardoned, or, rather—for there was nothing to pardon—has given him permission to leave Siberia and join his regiment at St. Petersburg."

"That is very good of the Tsar, isn't it?"

"In the same sense in which it is good of a burglar who robs your house not to cut your throat, it perhaps is. At any rate, Sergius does not seem to be very grateful. But he wants to see his brother very much, the more especially as Peter is bringing a wife and family with him from Siberia; and he has written to the Russian Government, through the ambassador at London, for leave to make a short visit to St. Petersburg, and if the answer be favourable we shall go."

"Oh, Dora, my child, it is a terrible undertaking!" said Mrs. Ryvington, who seemed much moved. "Have you no fear that they will be putting Sergius in prison again, like they did before; or perhaps—or perhaps——" "hanging him," she was going to say, but the words died on her lips.

"Sergius does not seem to have any fear," replied Dora, turning pale at her aunt's suggestion. "If the Government grant him a safe conduct through the ambassador, he is confident they will respect it; and he wants so much to see his brother. Just think how long they have been parted, and how many things have happened since—how they have both suffered!"

"Please God, Sergius may not be mistaken!" said Mrs. Ryvington, earnestly; "and that he will come back to us safe and sound. But surely you need not go, Dora? It is like a tempting of Providence for two to run into danger."

"If there is danger, it is my duty to share it with my husband. My place is with him. Oh, aunt, how could I let Sergius go alone?"

"When do you think of starting?" asked Mrs. Ryvington, who perceived from her niece's answer that any further attempt to dissuade her from her purpose would be of no avail.

"Oh, we do not know yet whether we shall be allowed to go

or not; but we shall leave for the Continent in three or four days. Sergius has received a letter from an old and dear friend at St. Petersburg, who expects shortly to be in Switzerland, and as, before he leaves, Peter Kalougia will probably have arrived, he may bring news of him; so Sergius has agreed to meet this friend, who is also a great friend of his brother, at Geneva or Vevey."

"And so you are going to Switzerland?"

"Yes; we shall stop a few days in London, and of course call upon Randle, and spend perhaps a week in Paris, by which time Sergius thinks his friend will have arrived in Switzerland."

"My Randle, you mean?"

"Of course I mean your Randle."

"Oh, Dora, give him my best love. And you will write and tell me how he is looking, won't you, dear, and if all seems well with him? And—and would you mind asking him how he is off for shirts? I asked him in my last letter, but he does not answer. Perhaps he has forgotten."

"Certainly, aunt. But would it not be better for you to come with us, and then you can see for yourself how he is looking, and mend his shirts for him? Come, now; let us give him a surprise."

"No, no, no, Dora," replied Mrs. Ryvington, with a triple shake of her head, and looking unutterable things. "It is bad enough for him to be away. If I went away too, and anything were to happen, I could never forgive myself."

CHAPTER LXI.

LADY CONACRE.

INSTEAD of proving, as he had confidently anticipated, a social success in London, Deep Randle proved so decided a social failure that he experienced great difficulty in suiting himself with a wife. He was not even popular with his own party, for, although he won their gratitude by gaining Whitebrook for them at his first election, he incurred their disfavour by defeating Mr. Mellodew at his second—as was reported, and generally believed—by unfair means. Then the story of his personation of his cousin in some inscrutable way got wind, and albeit, owing to the reticence of those concerned, it could not be authenticated, the rumour did not tend to improve his reputation. For these reasons, or from pure ill-luck, the greater part of the session passed away before Mr. Ryvington was afforded an opportunity

of effecting the object for which he had chiefly entered Parliament. True, he received occasional invitations from the leaders of his party, and made the acquaintance of some people of title; but, as he quickly found, there is a great difference between meeting a man at dinner, and marrying his sister or his daughter.

To make matters worse, Deep Randle, owing to the cost of the two elections, a rather profuse expenditure, and some losses on the turf, was extremely short of money, and the singular character of his interest in the Redscar property rendered it unavailable, save on onerous terms, as security for a loan.

He was in this condition of impecuniosity and despair when he found a friend in need in the person of Charles Alexander M' Mullen, Esq., M.P. for Rorytown, and made the acquaintance of the Dowager Lady Conacre.

By profession Mr. M' Mullen was an auctioneer and local political agitator, in which capacities he had developed so wonderful a power of speech and strength of lung that, on the recommendation of the leader of the Irish Irreconcilables, the patriots of Rorytown had sent him to Parliament; and as he was always ready to discourse at any length on any subject, and at any time, and could do without sleep or a clean shirt for a week, he soon became a distinguished member of his party, and a thorn in the side of the House of Commons.

Deep Randle met this gentleman quite by accident, and if, during the conversation that followed, Mr. M' Mullen had not alluded more than once to "me cousin Lady Conacre" (it was an allusion he was very fond of making), the acquaintance would probably have been dropped the day it began, for the only thing the two men had in common was a liking for whiskey. When, however, the junior member for Whitebrook found out (by consulting his "Peerage and Baronetage") that Lady Conacre was a young widow, he took an early opportunity of inviting the member for Rorytown to dine with him, an invitation which Mr. M' Mullen, who had never been known to refuse a "square meal" in his life, accepted with effusion. When they got well into their third bottle of burgundy, Mr. Ryvington took occasion to hint to his companion that he should like to make Lady Conacre's acquaintance.

"Nothing easier," said the ex-auctioneer, "I'll take you down to Bayswater and introduce you whenever you like. Shall we say to-morrow night?"

Deep Randle said, "To-morrow night." The introduction took place, and from the reception accorded to him, and from other circumstances, Mr. Ryvington rightly inferred that he was at last within sight of his matrimonial goal.

In truth, Lady Conacre had come to London on an errand similar to his own; and with the help of the member for Rorytown, who was as sharp at business as he was ready of speech, they were not long in arriving at an understanding.

The late Lord Conacre was an eccentric nobleman who had been equally notorious as a rack-renter and for the irregularity of his life. After he had buried his second wife, and passed his sixtieth year, he fell violently in love with the fine proportions, rich complexion, and bright eyes of Kate Sullivan, the daughter of one of his tenants, and as the only offer Kate would accept was the offer of his hand, and her father chanced to have a long lease and could not be turned out of his holding, the peer, who never denied himself anything which he could obtain by fair means or foul, made Miss Sullivan the third Lady Conacre. She had received a fair education for her position, and Lord Conacre engaged for her a lady companion, from whom she acquired a few superficial accomplishments and a certain knowledge of the usages of polite society.

Two years after their marriage Lord Conacre was shot dead at his own gates. The papers called it an agrarian murder, but, as the police could discover no clue to the crime, its real motive was never satisfactorily determined.

The whole of Lord Conacre's property went to his heir-in-law, and the only charge with which it was burdened in favour of the widow was an annuity of £500, but enjoyable only so long as she remained unmarried.

This was a great disappointment to Lady Conacre, for she had no vocation for single blessedness, and no desire to relapse into the position from which she had risen. She had a great wish, moreover, to see something of the world of fashion; and when her cousin, Charles M'Mullen, after his return for Rorytown, suggested that it would be a pleasant change for her, and might otherwise answer her purpose, to spend a few months in London, she lost no time in acting upon the hint, and established herself in the lodgings in Bayswater where Mr. Ryvington found her.

It was not a case for any great show of delicacy: and, when Deep Randle explained his circumstances and his hopes to Mr. M'Mullen, the latter declared that nothing could have fallen out better, that Lady Conacre and Mr. Ryvington were made for each other, and that he looked upon their meeting as simply providential.

In these circumstances, as may be supposed, there was not much time lost in courtship, and before Mr. Ryvington and Lady Conacre had known each other two weeks they were engaged to be married in two months.

CHAPTER LXII.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

THREE days after Dora had told her news to Mrs. Ryvington, she received a letter from Mrs. Ryvington's son, saying how delighted he should be to see her and Sergius in London, and how the pleasure with which he looked forward to her visit was shared by Lady Muriel, who charged him to say that, albeit she had not yet seen Mrs. Kalongia, she felt as if they had long known and loved each other, and was sure they would be the best of friends.

Randle also mentioned that he was making inquiries about Lady Conacre.

On their way to London Kalongia thought it well to inform his wife of the march her brother had tried to steal on her cousin, and of the former's visit to Avalon Priory. He feared that, if she were not told, her ignorance of the circumstances, especially in view of her brother's approaching marriage, might lead to some awkwardness during their intercourse with the Avalons, with whom, as he knew from Red Randle, Deep Randle was a *bête noire*.

Dora was both grieved and indignant at this new revelation of her brother's baseness. She declared that she would neither see her brother in London nor go to his wedding.

"It is not nice, quarrelling with your relations, if you can help it; there are black sheep in every family, you know," said Kalongia, philosophically. "We will make our stay in London very short, and our approaching visit to the Continent provides you with a good excuse for neither going to the wedding nor calling on Lady Conacre—if you would not like to call upon her."

"I am sure I should not like. She is only marrying him for his money, and he is marrying her for her title. But I suppose we shall hear more about it from my cousin. Do you know, Sergius, my brother's conduct, his treachery towards Randle, his eagerness to possess the estate by any means, however ignoble, almost make me wish that he may not obtain it? I do not covet the property for myself, as you know, and, if my brother had behaved properly, I should not be sorry to see it pass into his hands. But after what you have just told me——"

"You would rather your brother did not have Deepdene, my Dora."

"I am sure he does not deserve it; at any rate, not the whole of it; and Mr. Pleasington was saying the other day that Randle

is very much in debt already; and he thinks, if the estate goes to him, he will make ducks and drakes of it. I wish it could go to the other Randle instead."

"Well, perhaps your brother may not get the property after all."

"What do you mean, Sergius? If he marries Lady Conacre—and they are certainly engaged—he is sure to have Deepdene, is he not?"

"Oh, there's many a slip between the cup and the lip," answered Kalougia, carelessly. "He has been disappointed before, and he may be disappointed again. It is always the unexpected that happens, you know. But we shall soon be at Euston—let me put your things together for you."

Lady Muriel's anticipation that she and her *fiancé's* cousin would become good friends was fully realised. They liked each other from the first, and during the Kalougias' short sojourn in London were almost constantly together. Dora was willing to talk, and be talked to, all day long about Randle, a complaisance for which Muriel rewarded her by sometimes talking about her friend's husband, and saying how much she admired him. Sergius was, moreover, fortunate enough to find favour with Lord and Lady Lindisfarne and the other members of the Lindisfarne family.

The evening before their departure for Paris, Mr. and Mrs. Kalougia were invited to dine at Grosvenor Square. Among the guests were two or three members of Parliament, and others, who, when they found that Kalougia was a Russian and an exile, tried to elicit his views on the condition of his country. He had to answer many questions, and to relate some of his own personal experiences.

One of his interlocutors ventured to cast a doubt on the sincerity of Russian revolutionists, and, quoting from a leading daily paper, expressed the opinion that they were composed chiefly of cashiered officers, doctors without patients, and lawyers without clients—of men, in short, who had failed in life, and who looked upon disorder and rebellion as a means of retrieving their fortunes and enabling them to begin life afresh.

"You might as well say the Christian martyrs who suffered under Nero and Diocletian were not sincere," answered Kalougia, quietly. "Men do not sacrifice their lives for a cause in which they do not believe, nor do those who want to retrieve their fortunes begin a career which is almost sure, sooner or later, to lead them to Siberia or the scaffold. A cause that produces heroes and martyrs cannot be an imposture, and it cannot perish. If the blood of Christian martyrs was the seed of the Church, so will the blood of our martyrs be the seed of Russian liberty."

You do not know of what our Russian revolutionists are capable—not only strong men, but weak girls. Let me give you an instance. I knew three sisters of the name of Soubatina. They were young, well-born, gently nurtured, and highly educated. Filled with compassion for the sufferings and ignorance of the common people, they went, with the free consent of their aged mother, to work in a cotton factory at Moscow. They lived just as the others did, wrought at their looms fourteen hours a day, lived in filthy and crowded rooms that would disgrace a tramps' lodging-house, and in summer went about without shoes or stockings. They taught the poor people to read and gave them books, told them of the faults of the Government and the need of reform, and whenever they could sowed the seeds of revolution. In the end they were found out, and with fifty others, whose sole offence, like theirs, was making a peaceful propaganda, condemned to a long term of hard labour. Marie, the eldest and the boldest, did not long survive the hardships of prison life. Her sisters are now working out their sentences in Siberia. If necessary I could give you scores of such instances. Whatever else they may be, our revolutionists are at least in earnest."

"But do you think, or, rather, do these revolutionists, as you call them, think—for I suppose you are out of the running—they are going the right way to work, Mr. Kalougia?" put in Lord Lindisfarne. "Admitting that there is pressing need of reform—that (as to which I think there can be no question) the Russian Government, next to that of Turkey, is the very worst in Europe—admitting all this, would it not be better to submit quietly and wait patiently for a change that must come than to rush into all the unknown horrors of anarchy and revolution?"

"Oh, Lord Lindisfarne!" exclaimed the Russian, warmly; "you do not know what it is to live under a despotic Government; to have no rights; to feel that you are not a man; to be denied all voice in the government of your country; not to be able to speak in company without measuring your words; not to dare write your thoughts to a friend, your own brother even; to see people suffering, yet fear to complain; to see corruption usurping the place of justice, yet fear to expose it; to see vice successful, yet fear to denounce it. Would you, if you were a Russian, bow in meek submission to such a system, make no effort to overturn it, lift not up your voice to protest against it? And even submission is no security against oppression. My brother did not interfere with politics. He kept himself studiously aloof; he was a faithful soldier of the Tsar, yet he has had to waste five years of his life in Siberia. My poor sister was as innocent of all offence against the Government as a babe

unborn, yet she perished in a dungeon. And there are at this moment hundreds in prison as innocent as she—hundreds who, like her, will die untried and unaccused, and be buried in unvisited graves. Do you think educated people, people who have read and travelled and thought, who know right from wrong, can—I say can, not will—submit to such a rule? Every honest Russian except the most ignorant revolts against it in spirit, but only the bold conspire and rebel. And if some go to great lengths and preach strange doctrines—give back violence for violence, wounds for wounds, death for death—who that knows the truth can blame them? The blame is with those who provoked the contest. English people think, and all the world has been told, that the Nihilists, as they call them, are ruffians and murderers. They are the most devoted patriots the world has ever seen. Save in self-defence, or to punish a criminal whom the law was powerless to punish, they have never either inflicted a wound or taken a life. Yet, fearless and devoted though they are, if they did not possess the sympathy of their countrymen, if they did not represent a great cause, they would be as impotent as they are strong, and the Tsar might crush them with a nod.”

Lord Lindisfarne gladly left to one of his guests the task of replying to the Russian's passionate protest. “I don't much believe in the disinterested patriotism of these Nihilists,” he observed to Red Ryvington, who sat near him, “or in the fitness of the great mass of the Russian people for freedom. But you cannot argue with enthusiasts. Argument, implies reason, and enthusiasts are not reasonable.”

The conversation recalled to Randle's mind all the painful details of Kalougia's story, and he took an opportunity, later in the evening, of trying to dissuade him from his proposed journey to St. Petersburg, as to the expediency of which he was beginning to have grave doubts.

“What has happened once,” he said, “may happen again. They may put you in prison as they did before, in spite of promises and safe-conducts, and for your sake, as well as for Dora's, I should be sorry indeed if further harm were to befall you.”

“Nobody has greater reason than I have to distrust the Russian Government, my dear friend, and if I had the slightest fear of treachery I would not go to St. Petersburg, much as I want to see my brother. But I have not. You see, they let me go when they might have kept me, and since that time I have been true to my word; they have no further cause of offence against me, and I really cannot think that the safe-conduct I have asked for, if granted, will not be respected. But in the course of a fortnight I hope to meet my friend Antonoff in Switzerland. He will bring with him the latest information from St. Petersburg,

and, if I gather from him that there is any probability of treachery, I promise you, friend Ryvington, that I shall not go. For myself it perhaps does not much matter, but I would not for the world take any step which might cause unhappiness to Dora."

With this assurance Randle was obliged to be content, and the next evening he bade adieu to his cousin and her husband at Charing Cross Station. The parting, though not outwardly sad, was not without an element of pain; for if the Kalougias carried out their intention of going out to St. Petersburg, Randle could not expect to see them again for several months; and, albeit a journey to Russia is far from being a perilous undertaking, he greatly feared that it might prove so in the present instance, and that Sergius would have reason to regret his temerity in venturing into the lion's den.

Dora left London without seeing anything of her brother. For reasons best known to himself—perhaps because he was afraid of coming in contact with the other Randle—he had kept out of the way; and from the information Sergius had received about Lady Conacre he did not think it was desirable that his wife should call upon her.

From the station Red Ryvington took a hansom to his lodgings in Bury Street, whence, after getting any letters that might have come for him in the afternoon, he intended to go down to the House.

He found lying on his table quite a pile of missives, "whips," parliamentary papers, and one telegram, which he naturally opened first. It was from Auf der Mauer, and ran thus:—

"Sorry to say Robert left this afternoon for Liverpool, with intention, as I have reason to believe, of taking passage for America by to-morrow's steamer. Cause, speculations in cotton. Very bad business. If you could go straight on to Queenstown, you might perhaps intercept him."

This was a bolt from the blue, indeed, and when the full import of the message flashed on his mind, Randle reeled as if he had received a heavy blow, while great beads of perspiration started on his brow and rolled down his cheeks like tears. But, feeling that instant action was imperative, he pulled himself together, and wrote an answer to Auf der Mauer on the spot.

"Gone to Queenstown," it said; "expect me at Redscar on Monday."

Then he wrote a line to Muriel, saying that important business called him away for a few days; scribbled a note to the "Whip" of his party, asking that gentleman to find him a pair for a week; threw a few things into his dressing bag, jumped into his hansom, and drove off at full speed to catch the Irish express.

CHAPTER LXIII.

LADY CONACRE'S COUSIN.

NOBODY, probably, left London that night with a more uneasy mind than Red Ryvington, who only an hour before had esteemed himself one of the most fortunate of men. He suffered both from anxiety and suspense; for Auf der Mauer's message, while hardly giving a gleam of light, suggested the darkest possibilities. Randle knew that Robert was impulsive, but the lad was no fool, and he had never seen reason to doubt either his loyalty to the concern or his affection for himself. It could be no slight cause that had led him to take the desperate step which Auf der Mauer suspected he had taken. Could Auf der Mauer be wrong? It was possible, certainly, but little likely. The book-keeper was not the man to send so alarming and significant a telegram without some grounds to go upon. Randle almost feared, indeed, that there was worse to come. The message spoke of speculations in cotton, of "a very bad business." Who could have led Robert into cotton speculations? For led he must have been. Some scoundrel, taking advantage of his facility of disposition and inexperience, had made a tool of him—used him for his own purposes. Who could the scoundrel be? And Randle ground his teeth with rage, and vowed all sorts of vengeance against the unknown tempter. Then he remembered, with a bitter pang, that he had not been near Redscar for five months. He saw clearly that the burden he had laid on Bob had been too heavy for him to bear—that more power had been placed in his hands than he was competent to wield; and he said to himself, that if he had only gone to Redscar a few times, or even met his brother occasionally in Manchester, this trouble might have been spared.

In the agony of the moment he perhaps dealt himself harder measure than he deserved; for, after all, his fault was a very venial one. Much may be forgiven to a man who, under the spell of a great passion, becomes temporarily oblivious to hum-drum duties. But the world is unfortunately so constituted that the consequences of a slight error may be more disastrous than the consequences of a great crime, and Red Ryvington was apprehensive that his long sojourn in London, natural and excusable as it might be, had wrought irreparable evil. Though there was nothing in Auf der Mauer's message to show that Robert's speculations had seriously involved the concern, the expression "very bad business" made him infer the worst. In any event, it was hardly possible that he would be able to find the £20,000 for

Muriel's settlement, albeit the matter had gone so far that, only the day before, he had informed Lord Lindisfarne's lawyers the amount should be in their hands in the course of the following month, at which time the documents were to be ready for signature. If he should be unable to comply with the condition on which Lord and Lady Lindisfarne had consented to his union with Muriel, it would be quite within their right to withdraw their consent to the marriage, and even insist on the rupture of the engagement. The thought was torture.

And then his mood changed. Hope raised her head a little. He was perhaps taking too dark a view of the matter. There might be nothing worse than the loss or lock-up of a few thousands and a short postponement of his wedding day. It was bad policy to meet trouble half way. He would try to keep up his courage, cease to anticipate evil and ponder dark possibilities until he had seen Robert and Auf der Mauer and all the facts were before him.

When Randle arrived at this stage of his reflections he chanced to turn his head from the window through which, ever since he entered the carriage, he had been sadly gazing into the night. As he did so, he became conscious, for the first time, that he was not alone, and a voice at his elbow politely inquired if he would take a cigar.

"No, thank you," he said, absently.

But the question served to rouse him from his reverie, for the voice seemed familiar to him, and he glanced curiously at its owner. Yes, there was no mistaking that coarse, hard face, with the turned-up nose, wide nostrils, long upper lip, big mouth, unabashed eyes, and high colour. It was an overbearing, impudent face, with a wonderful capacity of stare about it; and for a minute or more it stared as hard at Red Ryvington as it knew how.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, we are colleagues, you and I," observed the owner of this unpleasant face.

"Colleagues!" exclaimed Randle, somewhat surprised at the imputation.

"Well, we sit on the same side of the House, if we do not always go into the same division lobby. You are one of the members for Whitebrook, I believe?"

Randle nodded.

"The senior member?"

Randle nodded again.

"A most remarkable coincidence that both members for the borough should bear the same name. You and the other Mr. Ryvington are brothers, I believe?"

"Cousins," replied Randle, who began to be rather amused

at his colleague's evident determination to force him into a conversation.

"Brothers' sons I meant to say. That makes you cousins, of course. I have the honour of your cousin's acquaintance, Mr. Ryvington. He is engaged to be married to me cousin, Lady Conacre."

"God bless me!" thought Randle, for though he had heard that Lady Conacre was not exactly nobly born, it never occurred to him that she was akin to the like of the member for Rorytown. "I wonder if she resembles him?"

"Indeed, I did not know you were related," he said.

"We are first cousins. Her ladyship's mother was a M'Mullen, and my late father's only sister. The family is one of the most ancient and respectable in the province of Connaught, Mr. Ryvington."

After this flourish the member for Rorytown looked as if he expected a reply; but seeing that Randle did not seem disposed to make any he tried another tack.

"That is a very fine property your cousin has at Whitebrook, Mr. Ryvington—£12,000 a year, I am told, and rapidly improving."

"It is not his property," said Randle, abruptly; "it is the property of his father's trustees, who pay over to him half the rental. The estate is not vested in him at all."

"But it will be when he marries me cousin, Lady Conacre."

"I suppose so," said Randle, reluctantly; "unless——"

"By the jabbers, you surely don't mean to insinuate that there is a chance of the sister being left a widow, and marrying a man with a handle to his name in the next four or five weeks!" exclaimed the Irishman, excitedly.

"Heaven forbid!" said Randle, and then, tickled by the absurdity of the idea, he burst into a loud laugh in which Mr. M'Mullen heartily joined.

"But, seriously," urged the latter, "nothing but that can stop my friend coming into the property, if he lives long enough to marry me cousin, Lady Conacre?"

"And does marry her."

"Exactly, and does marry her. And I will see to that, Mr. Ryvington."

This implied, Randle thought, that, in the event of his cousin trying to back out of his promise to marry Lady Conacre, he would be likely to pass a very bad quarter of an hour with Mr. M'Mullen.

In fact, though Red Ryvington did not know it, the member for Rorytown had staked his fortunes on the marriage coming off at an early date. Deep Randle, as we know, was hard up, a

circumstance which he one day communicated to M'Mullen as an excuse for not being able to make that gentleman the trifling advance of one hundred pounds sterling for the short period of one calendar month.

"Why don't you raise something on your expectations?" asked the patriot, surprised at this revelation.

Deep Randle explained that a money-lender to whom he had applied refused to make him a loan, except on very onerous terms indeed, on the ground that Mr. Kalougia might conceivably die, and Mrs. Kalougia marry a titled husband, before Mr. Ryvington had provided himself with a titled wife.

"That's absurd," observed the member for Rorytown. "And now that you are engaged to me cousin, Lady Conacre, there should be no difficulty. I know a man in Dublin that I am sure would accommodate you with a few thousands."

So the man in Dublin was communicated with, and a loan of £5,000 arranged at a comparatively moderate rate of interest. Out of this amount Deep Randle agreed to lend M'Mullen £500, besides giving him £200 for his trouble; and a further sum of £500 was to be placed at the disposal of Lady Conacre for the purchase of her *trousseau* and the payment of a few debts she had contracted in London. The money-lender, who was a cautious man, as money-lenders ought to be, had insisted that, in addition to the loan being made a charge on Mr. Ryvington's interest in his father's estate, it should be guaranteed by M'Mullen. Not, he said candidly, that he looked upon that gentleman's signature as being good for much; but it would constitute a sort of pledge of his good faith, and the accuracy of the representations he had made on behalf of the borrower. This condition the member for Rorytown had rather reluctantly accepted, and he was now on his way to Dublin to complete the transaction, and draw the money.

After leaving Holyhead, Red Randle lost sight of his cousin's new connection, a loss which, as may be supposed, did not cause him any particular regret.

CHAPTER LXIV.

TEMPTER AND TEMPTED.

WHEN Red Ryvington boarded the Cunard liner in Queenstown his keen eye, sharpened by excitement, was not long in detecting among the figures on the quarter-deck that of his brother. He saw Robert before Robert saw him, and although, when the

young fellow became aware of Randle's presence, he turned deadly pale, he made no attempt to evade him.

"Oh! Robert," said Randle, in a low, intense tone, "why are you deserting those who love you? This is worse than all. Get your things together, and let us go home."

Albeit Randle had good cause for anger with his brother, for the latter had acted very weakly, and being lamentably lacking in loyalty towards himself and the concern, he resolved, before setting foot on board the *Bithynia*, to treat the prodigal with all possible kindness and forbearance, as much because he deemed this the best policy as because it was most in accordance with his own feelings. If the position in which Robert now found himself failed to bring him to a sense of the error of his conduct, scolding was not likely to be more effective. Randle was, moreover, painfully conscious that his own sins of omission had, in all probability, rendered possible, if they had not directly caused, Robert's sins of commission. It was no time for recrimination; what they had now to do was to put their shoulders to the wheel, and extricate the firm from the difficulties in which it was almost certainly involved.

The first question Randle asked his brother when they were alone together was naturally what he had been doing, and why he had run away.

Robert's story, save for technical details, which would little interest the reader, was short and simple—a story of cunning and knavery on the one side, and weakness and credulity on the other.

Randle had hardly left Redscar when Tom Cliviger, whom Robert often met at the "Rainbow" on going to and from Manchester and Liverpool, and with whom the firm had an occasional transaction in yarn, began to talk to him about operations in cotton, and try to allure him by telling how much money had been made, and still could be made, by judicious buying and selling for future delivery. Tom had himself "pulled a lot of money off" in this way, and he suggested to Bob what a pleasant surprise it would be to his brother, and what a fine feather in his own cap, if during Randle's absence he could add a thousand pounds or two to the ordinary profits of the business by "playing off his own bat." This was taking Robert on his blind side, for he was greatly lifted up by being placed in exclusive charge of the business; and he had not yet learnt by painful experience to distrust the fallibility of his own judgment or doubt the disinterestedness of other men's motives. The yarn agent next laid before him a series of elaborate calculations to show that nothing could possibly prevent cotton beginning to rise in price at a certain date, and to go on rising thereafter for several months. Robert was

greatly impressed by these calculations. They seemed flawless, and he allowed himself without much difficulty to be persuaded into joining a combination for buying cotton—to a strictly moderate extent—for future delivery. He did stipulate for a limit, but the paper by which, on behalf of the firm, he gave Oliviger authority “to operate” was so ingeniously drawn, that, while seeming to a careless reader strictly limited, it really allowed the widest discretion. And the hapless youth did read it carelessly, or, rather, his confidence in the yarn agent’s honesty was so complete that he accepted his construction of its meaning with undoubting faith.

The great charm of the scheme was that no money would be required. As prices were sure to go up, the cotton bought to arrive would be resold before delivery was tendered, and thereby made to pay for itself. It would be simply an affair of pocketing the profits, which were to be divided in certain proportions among the concerned; for Oliviger really believed in the accuracy of his calculations, and thought he was putting Bob in for a good thing. Two or three other persons were interested in the combination, but they were the yarn agent’s nominees, and little better than men of straw. In short, the speculation was so organised, that if there were a loss, at any rate a heavy loss, it would have to be borne by Ryvington and Sons, the only wealthy members of the confederacy; while, if there were a profit, more than half of it would fall to Oliviger and his associates.

When all was in order, the yarn agent began “to put the big pot on.” At first he bought cautiously; then, as the cotton seemed to be justifying his provisions by tending upwards, more largely; and he went on until he stood to lose or win a very considerable stake. He generally gave the name of Ryvington and Sons as his principals, but by way, as he thought, of increasing the importance of his own firm, he sometimes gave that of Thomas Oliviger and Co.

A few of the earlier purchases turned out well. They were resold at a fair profit, and Bob began to think himself a good deal cleverer than either his brother or his father, and to look upon his elders as having been strangely lacking in foresight and enterprise.

Then an event or two befell which Mr. Oliviger had omitted to include in his calculations. A great State, whose circulating medium consisted chiefly of postage stamps, suddenly resolved to resume specie payments, and bought up all the gold it could lay hands on; and Prince von Bismarck, in a fit of indigestion, brought on by excessive indulgence in *cervalletenwurst* and lager beer, made a warlike speech in the Reichstag, and threatened all Europe with his displeasure. On this the rate of

discount went up two per cent., everything else went down, and a few thousand persons were ruined. The yarn agent, after observing that nobody could possibly have foreseen such a catastrophe, and that he wished Bismarck—well, a very long way off—informed Robert that they must either sell their cotton as delivery was tendered, at a severe loss, or hold it. Courage failed Robert to close the speculation and confess to his brother what he had done, and he made bad worse by deciding “to hold.” But holding means finding money, and as Cliviger vowed he could find none, it devolved upon Bob to provide all the needful. This he did in the firm belief that the stress was only temporary, and that in a few days the cotton market would be in such a condition that they might dispose of their purchases at a profit. But weeks went on, prices did not improve, and the unhappy youth, continually pressed by Cliviger, drew cheque after cheque until he had completely exhausted the balance at the bank (upon which Randle was relying for Muriel’s settlement) and overdrawn the account by nearly £15,000. Every cheque, his tempter assured him, should be the last; and the more he became involved the more impossible did he find it to extricate himself from the toils. It was hell upon earth, he told Randle, as the tears rolled down his cheeks; and at length, torn by remorse and aghast at the frightful difficulties into which he had brought the concern and himself, he felt that if he did not get away somewhere beyond Cliviger’s reach he must either kill himself or go mad.

His flight was hastened by a discovery of Auf der Mauer’s, who opened a letter asking for money which the yarn agent had inadvertently addressed to the firm instead of to Robert; and when the latter went away the book-keeper inferred, from a hasty remark which he had let drop and the wildness of his manner, that he had gone to Liverpool with the intention of proceeding to America.

“Oh! Bob, do you know what you have done? You have ruined yourself and wrecked the concern,” groaned Randle, when his brother had concluded this doleful story.

“Oh! surely not, Randle; it cannot be as bad as that!” gasped Robert, almost too agitated to articulate. “Dear brother Ran, do forgive me! I have done very wrong, but God knows I did not mean to do so; and—and the losses cannot be greater than my credit balance—my share—you know. I will pay them all; indeed I will. Do forgive me, Ran. I will pay everything, and work for you all my life.”

“Say no more, Bob,” said Randle, putting his arms round his brother’s neck. “That expression was wrung from me in the agony of the moment. It is true that you have done wrong, very wrong.

But I, too, have failed in my duty; and if you need my forgiveness, I need yours almost as much. But that is past; what we have to do now is to hurry home, get out a full statement of your transactions with that scoundrel, and see what can be done to keep the old ship off the breakers."

CHAPTER LXV.

DEEP WATERS.

AFTER a weary and melancholy journey the brothers arrived at Redscar on the Monday morning, as Randle had expected. Tired though they were, they went straight to the counting-house, and, after sending word to their mother that they should not be home till late in the evening, called Auf der Mauer into council, and with his help proceeded to an examination of Bob's papers and his correspondence with Cliviger. The books and accounts were fortunately in good order. Robert had kept a record of everything, and, though the analysis of them was long and laborious, the task was less complicated than they had anticipated.

The result of the investigation was appalling. Instead of having upwards of £20,000 with their bankers, as Randle had supposed, there was a balance of £15,000 against them. The aggregate of these two amounts, some £40,000, had been paid to Cliviger (who had "financed" the cotton purchases with various Liverpool brokers) as margins, and the value of the cotton held on account of the firm reached a total of £160,000. In addition to this there were a few hundred bales still to arrive, of which delivery would have to be taken in the course of the following month.

"I see nothing for it but to suspend payment," exclaimed Randle, with quivering lips, after he had gone for the twentieth time over the figures, vainly hoping to find in them some gleam of light.

He spoke to Auf der Mauer, for Bob, overcome by anxiety and excitement, was in a state of mental and physical collapse.

"Don't lose courage, Mr. Ryvington," replied the clerk. "There are times when the head of a firm requires courage as much as the commander of an army, and this is one of them. Why should you think of suspending payment? Even if all these margins represent loss, and I can show you that they do not, you will still have a handsome property left."

"That is quite true. But don't you see that the £40,000 that has been paid and the £10,000 still to be paid will almost exhaust

our working capital, and we cannot carry on business without capital, you know."

"Some of your neighbours carry on with very little, though."

"I know they do. They get advances from their agents; they are in debt to their brokers; they borrow from their bankers. But that is not the way Ryvington and Sons do business, and, while I am at the head of the concern, Mr. Auf der Mauer, it never shall be. If I cannot carry on this business honourably and independently, as my fathers have done before me, I would rather—inexpressibly bitter and humiliating as the alternative would be—I would rather pull up now, while I can pay every man his due—and make a fresh start in some new country."

"I know you have a high sense of honour, Mr. Ryvington, and I admire your spirit. But don't you think you are carrying your independence just a little too far? You surely would not suspend payment—that is to say, wreck the concern utterly—if you could honourably do otherwise. Now I think you can honourably do otherwise. This forty or fifty thousand pounds of margins does not represent a total loss, nor anything like it. Cotton is firmer already these last few days; it is almost sure to go up, I think. A little rise would reduce the loss to very insignificant proportions; a good rise would bring you out with a profit. Look at these calculations and estimates; they are based on the latest information and carefully made."

"So far as that goes, I am of your opinion," answered Randle, after glancing at the book-keeper's figures. "We have the cotton, and our best policy is to hold it for a rise. It cannot well fall. But the question is, how? We may have to hold it for two or three months yet."

"Not so long as that, I think. With £15,000 more, we could do it, and do it easily."

"No, Mr. Auf der Mauer, that would not be enough. We want £30,000. You are assuming that the £15,000 we owe Bargolds will be allowed to remain. I have a rooted aversion to overdrafts, and the concern has never been in the habit of borrowing from its bankers. Yet I am no blind observer of traditional rules, and in the present emergency, and so long as I know that we are far more than solvent, I would not hesitate to keep this overdraft. But I fear we shall not have the chance. Mr. Bargold Badger has very sharp ears; he is as sure to hear of my brother's speculations as we sit here, and when he does hear, we shall be asked, with very little ceremony, to pay up. No, I do not see that it is possible to make head against this trouble with less than £25,000 or £30,000."

"Could you not raise that much by way of mortgage?"

"Not very well. The property is encumbered with a settlement of £30,000 in favour of my brother, my mother, and myself. It is just conceivable that we might obtain an advance on the security of a second mortgage, but it would be an affair of weeks, perhaps months, and we want the money at once."

"Would not Mr. Twister, or some other friend, help you?"

"Twister is a very good fellow, and if it were a matter of two or three thousand pounds, or even more, I daresay he would be willing enough. But he is not the man to have £30,000 lying idle at his banker's; and I am sure he could not, however much he might be disposed, find so large a sum in a few days. Indeed, I know no one who could."

"Are you quite sure Badgers would not go farther?"

"I think it is very unlikely. My individual experience in borrowing money from bankers—or anybody else—is happily nothing. But I have always understood they are easily frightened, and never so little disposed to give a man a lift as when he most requires it. Now, I could not ask Badgers to lengthen our tether without telling them the reason why, and explaining our position; and if they knew how deep we are in cotton, I fear they would not only refuse us further help, but insist on the repayment of what they have lent us. I am not at all sure that I could bring myself to ask the favour of them; but I want to argue the matter from your point of view. No, Mr. Auf der Mauer, I cannot see my way at all. I wish I could."

"Oh, but you must not think of stopping. Despair is a bad counsellor, Mr. Ryvington," exclaimed the book-keeper, with an energy that somewhat surprised Randle. "We are not at the end of our resources yet by a long way, and time is in our favour. At least you will not take any irretrievable step for the present. There is really no reason why you should. We can pay our way for ten days yet, easily, without drawing a single cheque, or incurring a single additional liability, and there are no cotton engagements to meet for a fortnight or more."

"Perhaps you are right," said Randle, wearily, for he was utterly worn out with anxiety and want of rest. "I daresay your judgment is sounder than mine just now; and I quite admit that, the existence of the concern being at stake, I ought not to throw away even the remotest chance. I accept your advice, Auf der Mauer, and I will see what the week brings forth before seeking any other advice, even that of my old friend Mr. Pleasington; but it will be a week of misery."

Red Ryvington had now another painful task to perform. He had to tell his mother. He would fain, if he could, have spared her the ill news for a few days. But she knew of Robert's sudden disappearance and of his own sudden return. She had

already, he did not doubt, come to the conclusion that there was something seriously wrong, and any attempt to keep back the truth would, he felt sure, cause her greater unhappiness than a full statement of the facts. He therefore resolved to tell her all, and did tell her all.

For a little while she did not speak. It took her some time to realise that the firm of Ryvington and Sons was on the brink of ruin, and that this position had been brought about by the neglect of one of her sons and the weakness of the other.

After sitting several minutes with compressed lips and tightly folded hands, Mrs. Ryvington looked Randle full in the face.

"Oh, Randle," she said, "don't be hard on Robert. He is very young, and I have only him and you."

"Dear mother," answered Randle, tenderly, taking both her hands in his, "how could I be hard on the lad? I am quite as much to blame as he is. It is not for me to reproach him. I should have looked after him better."

"No, Randle; I cannot let you say that. My heart bleeds for the lad; but truth is truth. You are not so much to blame as he is. You should have come down to look after things, it is true; but that does not justify him in deceiving his partner and his mother; for whenever I asked him, and I asked him often, how the business was doing, he always said it was doing well. You have made a mistake, and he has committed a sin; that is the difference between you. But we all need forgiveness; and though Robert has been culpably weak he has not been deliberately wicked. But I take blame to myself for having encouraged you to go to Parliament; that is the root of the evil."

To this remark Randle made no answer. Whatever might befall he could not regard with regret an event which had enabled him to unmask his cousin's villainy and win Muriel's love.

"It is a sore trial for you, my dear lad," she continued; "almost the sorest, not being death, that could have come upon you. But we are blind creatures; it is perhaps all for the best, and the Lord in His own good time will open a way of deliverance. Follow this Auf der Mauer's advice—he seems a sensible man—and wait awhile. Whether for good or for evil, none of us can tell what a day may bring forth. Let us lay our case before the throne of grace. 'The Lord is a very present help in time of trouble.'"

When Randle met his mother the next morning, she looked very pale and worn. He knew as well as if she had told him that she had passed the greater part of the night on her knees.

After a more than usually affectionate exchange of greetings she produced some papers and a bank book, for Mrs. Ryvington

was both a thrifty housekeeper and a woman of business. She never troubled her sons with her money matters. She might consult them on occasion, perhaps; but she invested her savings strictly on her own judgment, drew her own dividends, signed her own cheques, kept her own bank account, and she took good care that nobody ever cheated her out of a penny.

"This is what I have got, Randle," she said; "if it will be of any use to the concern you must take it. What is not in a money shape can soon be turned into money. I have no doubtful securities. I think you will find that altogether there is about £4,000. Here is the list."

"Oh! mother," exclaimed Randle, deeply moved, "I cannot take this from you."

"Why not?"

"Because, in the first place, it is not enough, and in the second, it may be all you will have to live upon—for awhile."

"How so? Have we not £30,000 settled?"

"We have, secured by a mortgage on the property. But if we do not get over this trouble, and the mills" (here a lump seemed to rise in Randle's throat) "and the mills have to stop, there will be nobody to pay the interest. There would be no interest forthcoming, in fact, until the property was either sold or let."

Mrs. Ryvington reluctantly acquiesced in this reasoning, and folded up her papers.

"But promise me this, dear. If it should so be that you can use it, and it will be ever so little help to the concern or yourself, you will use it."

"I promise, always provided I am sure of being able to repay you. Why, what a pile you have, mother," said Randle, smiling for the first time since he had left Queenstown. "I had no idea you were half so rich."

"It has been saved little by little," answered the lady, seriously, "the greater part out of my housekeeping money, and I have been very fortunate with my investments."

Mrs. Ryvington was not the only member of the family who looked ill, and Auf der Mauer was so alarmed by the pallor of his employer's face that, fearing inferences might be drawn therefrom unfavourable to the credit of the concern, he sent a paragraph for insertion in the local papers stating that the senior member for the borough, having suffered in health from his Parliamentary labours, had paired with Sir Twofold Finespinner, the member for Murkford, and was enjoying a few days' repose at Redscar. As for Bob, he looked so woebegone that Randle sent him off to Scarborough, with instructions to stay there until he was told to come back.

For Randle the week that ensued was one long agony. So far from taking rest he was never still, and his sleep was fitful and unrefreshing. He went about with a foreboding of impending calamity that almost crushed the life out of him. He thought of the factories as closed, the busy hum of the spindles as hushed, the rooms empty, the hands, most of whom he had known from his boyhood, gone; and when he pictured to himself the misery a stoppage would entail, not only by the temporary loss of wages to so many who had only their wages to depend upon, but by the severance of old ties, the separation of families in search of work, the disappointment of hopes, he could hardly look his work-people in the face. One night when he went home, he threw himself into his mother's arms and wept like a child.

Meanwhile nothing altered; the position at the end of the week remained substantially as he had found it on his return from London. Cotton was, perhaps, slightly dearer, and that was so far good; but, though the rise gave good ground for hope, it was too insignificant to afford material relief.

Randle wrote to Muriel as cheerfully as he might, carefully avoiding all mention of his troubles. But the loving girl could read between the lines. The letters were not the sort he was wont to write. She knew, as well as if he had told her, that his mind was ill at ease, and she besought him with affectionate solicitude to tell her what was amiss. If she was worthy of his love, she said, she deserved to be made the partner of his cares.

Randle received a letter to this effect, being the second of the sort Muriel had written him, on the Monday morning following his arrival at Redscar. He received at the same time another letter of a very different sort, a letter which promised to bring his affairs to a crisis. It ran thus—

[PRIVATE.]

“Badger's Bank, Manchester.

“Messrs. Bargold, Badger and Co. present their compliments to Messrs. Ryvington and Sons, and will be glad to see them at their early convenience with reference to the state of their account.”

“There,” exclaimed Red Ryvington, bitterly, as he showed the missive to Auf der Mauer. “I told you how it would be. I declare I would rather live on potatoes and salt than be dependent on the caprice of the best banker that ever breathed, or be a banker. Bankers have neither conscience nor bowels.”

“You are less than just, Mr. Ryvington,” said the book-keeper, quietly. “Bankers are very useful people; business could hardly go on without them. And I do not think that

Badgers have done badly. They have let us have £15,000 without asking a question or making a demur. Perhaps all they require is a little explanation; and they have a full right to ask for it, specially if, as you surmise, they have heard anything about Robert's cotton operations."

"You are right, and I am wrong, Auf der Mauer. I spoke too hastily. But what is to be done?—that is the question."

"You will see Badgers?"

"Of course; I will go to Manchester for that purpose by the early train to-morrow morning."

"Well, if I may venture to advise you, Mr. Ryvington, you will tell them that the account was overdrawn by your brother without your knowledge; that it is due to a temporary lock-up; that the concern is far more than solvent; and ask them to let you have £5,000 or £10,000 more."

"I do not think I could do that, Auf der Mauer. Ryvington and Sons never asked a favour of their bankers since they were a firm, and I fear I am too proud to begin."

"But you have begun, for if the firm has not asked a favour it has taken one, and that is pretty much the same thing. The question is whether for a scruple—honourable though it may be—you will throw away a chance, not only of saving the concern, but of coming out of this difficulty without loss. In any case, you should speak Badgers fair. Every day gained counts in our favour. Cotton was stronger again on Saturday, and I count on a still stronger market to-day."

"You advise well, Auf der Mauer," returned Randle, after some minutes' thought. "And now hear my decision. Come what may, I will not have a penny of Badger's money on any false pretence whatever. I shall tell them the whole truth. I shall tell them further that, if they are disposed to let us have £10,000, we shall get over our difficulties. I will even go so far as to say that, if they will make this additional advance, we shall take it as a favour. But eat humble pie I will not, and I do not think it would be of any use if I did."

Auf der Mauer was of the same opinion. He thought, too, that Red Ryvington's independence and frankness might perhaps prove more effective in the circumstances than deference and humility.

Randle wrote the same day a letter to Muriel, in which he told her that he was in truth in sore trouble, and needed all the sympathy she could give him. As to the nature of the trouble, it arose entirely from business difficulties hardly susceptible of explanation in a letter. They might either pass away or become still more aggravated, as to which the next twenty-four hours would probably decide. He hoped for the best. But whatever

befell he had the most implicit confidence in her constancy and affection; the assurance of her love was an inexpressible comfort to him. It was his pole-star, a light shining in darkness. He asked for a letter every day, and, though his own letters might sometimes be unavoidably brief, he promised to write to her every day until they met again.

CHAPTER LXVI.

DRAWING A BADGER.

BARGOLD, BADGER, and Co. were a firm of high repute and old standing. The original Bargold, a country grocer, laid the foundations of its prosperity, at a time when paper money was inconvertible and hard cash scarce, by changing bank-notes for his customers. "No purchase, no change," was an inflexible rule with him. Those who wanted notes "doing" had either to buy an ounce of tobacco; a pound of candles, a pot of treacle, or a barrel of flour, according to the character and extent of the transaction. But this was a clumsy way of doing business, and it one day occurred to Mr. Bargold that it would come to the same thing in the end, and be a good deal easier for everybody, if, instead of making people who wanted hard money for soft take groceries which they did not always want, he charged them a moderate percentage by way of remuneration for his risk and trouble. This innovation, after considerable questioning, was adopted, and led to so great an increase of business that, in a few years, the money-changing beat the grocery out of the field. The shop was turned into a bank, and Mr. Bargold, who, though eminently safe, was not particularly pushing, took into partnership his son and a young man of the name of Badger, who had a wonderful head for figures and a genius for finance, and the firm became Bargold, Badger, and Co. Badger married his senior partner's only daughter, and when the two Bargolds died, leaving him nearly all their money, the bank became a family possession of the Badgers, who, not finding in the country town where old Billy Bargold had sold groceries and cashed notes sufficient scope for their energies, betook themselves to Manchester, where, in course of years, the house became a great institution and its wealth a tradition.

At the time when Red Ryvington received the unpleasant missive set forth in the preceding chapter, the head of the firm was Mr. Bargold Badger (so called after the pious founder).

Seeing, however, that, contrary to the wont of his tribe, he had no partners, it would perhaps be more correct to say that he was both head and tail of the firm. Inside his bank he was like Robinson Crusoe on his island, lord of all he surveyed.

When Red Ryvington reached "Badgers" (as the bank was popularly called), the business of the day had just begun. Managers were reading their letters and giving instructions, senior clerks posting up ledgers, junior clerks writing up customers' pass-books, and tellers counting out their money. Absorbed in his thoughts, which were naturally none of the pleasantest, Randle walked rapidly past the long shining counter, with its array of scales, shovels, and inkpots, towards a sort of compartment not unlike a confession box, to which access was gained by a half-glass door which swung noiselessly on its hinges. This box, with its mahogany framework and crystal panels, many a poor penitent entered quaking and left unshriven. Several times already had Randle been therein, but merely to make inquiry touching the stability of some new or doubtful customer, on which occasions he was always treated with the effusive politeness that bankers never fail to show to clients who keep a good balance to their credit and give them no trouble.

A small counter divided the compartment from the interior of the bank; over against this counter was a door opening into a small parlour, and almost at the same moment that Randle stepped into the box there walked into the parlour a somewhat undersized man of ruddy countenance devoid of beard and whisker, with abundant iron-grey hair parted in the middle. He wore a flower in his button hole, and his general appearance was rather that of an amateur gardener or country gentleman than a financial magnate.

When the banker caught sight of his visitor, he came forward and greeted him; yet, though his words were as fair as his manner was courteous, Randle thought he discerned a hardness in his face and a coldness in his tone which boded ill for the outcome of the interview. In this Randle may have been mistaken; for, although Mr. Badger was fond of power and capricious in its use, he was not often deliberately harsh. But he liked to make his power felt, and whether he did a man a favour or a disfavour, he took good care not to leave him in ignorance of the fact. He seemed to think, moreover, that he had a semi-divine mission to reward the virtuous and punish the wicked—the virtuous being those who kept active banking accounts and paid twenty shillings in the pound; the vicious, those who omitted to observe either or both of these supreme obligations. In Mr. Badger's estimation, not to keep a banking account was to

commit an unpardonable sin. But he considered it his duty on occasion to read even the virtuous a lesson, and he had made up his mind that, before Red Ryvington left the confessional, he should feel to the marrow of his bones that he was at the mercy of the house, and that he would owe any respite he might receive to the goodwill and pleasure of Mr. Bargold Badger. It appeared to the banker, indeed, that Randle had been getting on much too fast lately (in everything except his business of cotton spinning), and a lesson would do him good.

"I was sorry to see by a paragraph in the papers that you are rather out of health," said Mr. Bargold. "I hope the rest you are taking will do you good."

Randle said he thought it would.

"You have been working too hard at your parliamentary and other duties, I suppose, and keeping late hours. I hope there is no other cause." As Mr. Bargold spoke he threw his head back, as if to watch the effect of his thrust, in a way that suggested to Randle the attitude of a barndoor fowl when it gobbles up a worm.

"Cause for what?"

"For your illness."

"I am not ill; I am only a little out of sorts. A few days' rest will put me to rights, I hope."

"I trust you find business satisfactory. All has been going on well in your absence, eh?" asked the banker, throwing his head back, and eyeing Randle keenly.

"Business generally is satisfactory, I believe. As to our own concern, to speak candidly, I fear it has rather suffered by my absence."

"You mean that your brother has been buying too much cotton, and cotton is sick, eh?" (Here Mr. Badger made as if he had gobbled up another imaginary worm.)

"It is better now, though; the market was stronger yesterday, with higher prices."

"I am glad to hear it for your sake. But" (abruptly) "this is trifling. You got a letter from us, I suppose?"

"That is why I am here."

"Precisely. Our friends rarely omit to respond to our invitations. You have been overdrawing your account."

"Unfortunately, yes."

"You are right. It is unfortunate when people go away and leave their business in incompetent hands. I do not know what your opinion may be, Mr. Ryvington, but I think I have treated your firm with great indulgence in this matter; and that you have somewhat presumed on my good nature. I remember my father once offering your father any overdraft he liked. But

your father refused it. You were independent at Redscar in those days. In any case, your father, I am sure, would never have thought of overdrawing his account without making an arrangement beforehand; and it is really quite irregular to draw cheques at large, as you have been doing lately, without either leave or notice. Suppose we had refused them, where would you have been then? If it had been a matter of five or six thousands, or even of ten or twelve, I should probably have said nothing, for you are among our oldest customers; but one must draw the line somewhere, and when I saw the amount running up to twenty thousand, I thought it was time to make a stand."

"Twenty thousand!" exclaimed Randle, who, although exasperated by this harangue almost beyond endurance, was restrained from turning his back on Mr. Badger, and quitting the box without answering a word, by a sudden fear that Bob had overdrawn the account even more than he had told him.

"I said 'running up to twenty thousand.' However, if you want to know exactly how much it is I will soon tell you. Mr. Topps" (raising his voice and clapping his hands).

Almost as the banker spoke, Mr. Topps appeared, and very "topsey" he looked, being a little man of girth so great in proportion to his height as to suggest a resemblance to two tops fastened together. It was said that he could balance himself indifferently on either end; and he really looked as if he might. But he had a bright, intelligent face of his own, and seemed very much alive.

"Ryvington and Sons' account," said Mr. Badger.

"Yes, Mr. Badger," and the little man whipped out of sight with a celerity, considering his bulk, perfectly astonishing.

In less than a minute Mr. Topps reappeared, holding open in his hand a book about the size of a copy-book, but considerably thicker.

"Ryvington and Sons' account," he said, looking at the book, "is £15,155 to credit."

The banker's healthy face flushed a deeper crimson, and his eye emitted an angry glance.

"Why, how is this?" he exclaimed. "You told me on Saturday that it was £15,000 to debit."

"It was very nearly—£14,845. But £30,000 were paid to Messrs. Ryvingtons' credit in London yesterday, through—yes—through Redshields."

"Were you aware of this?" asked Mr. Badger, turning to Red Ryvington.

"I was not; but I left home this morning without seeing my letters. I may find the advice on my return," replied Randle, who, though utterly astounded at this godsend, had wit enough

to keep his countenance and not let the banker perceive how little he was expecting such a deliverance.

"Well," observed Mr. Badger, with a mien as gracious as a moment before it had been austere, "I suppose there is nothing more to be said. If I had known you were arranging for a payment to credit in London I should not, of course, have thought it necessary to ask you to call. But, as you are here, had we not better put this question of an overdraft on a proper footing? How much do you want? I make you the same offer my father made to your father—name your own limit."

"And I make you the same answer my father made to your father," said Randle, proudly. "I thank you for your offer and decline it. This is my first experience of an overdraft, and it shall be my last. Good morning, Mr. Badger." And the member for Whitebrook left the banker's presence with a feeling of relief as great as if he had been escaping from the torture-room of the Inquisition.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

RANDLE'S feeling of relief was followed by a feeling of intense curiosity. Where, he asked himself (and the oftener he asked himself the more his wonder grew), had the £30,000 come from? Who was the friend in need? Redshields were, of course, merely the intermediaries—the spout through which the golden stream had reached him. A mistake? The idea was conceived only to be dismissed. Bankers do not make mistakes when thousands are concerned. Knowledge of the critical position of the concern was confined to Bob, Auf der Mauer, his mother, and himself. The book-keeper alone, besides himself, knew how much was required to enable them to meet their engagements. But it was out of the question that the book-keeper could find so large a sum at so short a notice, or at any notice; and if he had been contemplating anything of the sort there was no conceivable reason why he should have concealed the fact from his employer. Yet, if Auf der Mauer had not himself found the money, he might know who had; and Red Ryvington was so eager to get at the bottom of the mystery that, after a short conference with Oates at the warehouse and half an hour on 'Change, he returned to Redscar.

The moment Randle reached the office he sent for the book-

keeper, who was in some other part of the factory. Then he took up the letters that lay on his desk. One of them bore the Paris post-mark.

"From Kalougia," he muttered, as he opened it.
The Russian's letter ran as follows:—

"Paris, Sunday.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"Three days ago I received a letter from Auf der Mauer, in which he told me that, owing to a temporary lock-up of capital, you were in rather pressing need of £30,000. As, thanks to a sale of some of my property in Russia to a railway company, I chanced to have this sum at my disposal, I immediately arranged with the House of Redshields to have the amount in question paid to the credit of your bankers in London. This, I am told, will be done on Monday, so that the money ought to be available for you in Manchester on Tuesday.

"You must not regard this, my dear friend, either as a loan or a gift. It is yours. I never earned a rouble of this money, and I am not sure that I have any special right to it. In any case, it was of no earthly use to me, and if you can do any good with it for yourself, or those about you, you will add another to the many favours which I already owe you. Should I ever, on my part, be in want of money, you will, I am sure, let me have what I require; for though we are not sons of the same mother, nor even natives of the same land, we are brothers in spirit, and that which one of us has the other will never lack.

"When you receive this letter we shall probably be in Switzerland, but whether at Vevey or Geneva I am not yet sure. Pending our further news you had perhaps better write to us at the Hôtel de la Croix, Geneva.

"Your faithful friend,

"SERGIUS KALOUGIA.

"P.S.—I am sure you will not blame Auf der Mauer for having written to me. He is a very good fellow and has your interest at heart, and though he may have committed a breach of regulations, there are times, you know, when a man has to be a law to himself, and I trust you will think with me that, in this matter, Auf der Mauer exercised a wise discretion.—S. K."

"DEAR OLD RAN,

"I asked Sergius to leave me a corner, and like a dutiful husband he has done as he was told. I have never seen him so pleased since we first met as when he knew that it was in his power to help you in your need. I quite agree with all he has written. You will perhaps say it is a Quixotic

notion, but unless you use your money to make those you love happy I really don't see the good of it. Self-help is a principle often highly commended, but, as Sergius said the other day, 'help others' is a far nobler rule of life.

"My best love to aunt and—yes—you may kiss Lady Muriel twice for me. There now.

"Your affectionate cousin (in fact) and sister (in spirit),
"DORA."

Red Ryvington was still poring over this letter, which was hardly less of surprise to him than the payment of the £30,000 by Redshields had been, when Auf der Mauer entered. After a moment's hesitation Randle gave him the letter to read. He thought the clerk deserved this mark of confidence.

"I knew of the payment," said Auf der Mauer. "Here is a letter of advice from Redshields which, being addressed to the firm, I opened."

"Of course. But what induced you to write to Mr. Kalougia in the first instance? Had you any reason to suppose that he could, or would, find the money?"

"No special reason. I knew he was a true friend of yours, and I felt sure that if he could help you he would. I knew, too, that he belonged to a highly respectable family, and that his father had left him a fortune, but how much I had not the least idea."

"I hope you did not ask him in so many words to lend us the money?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Ryvington. I merely mentioned the fact that you were in a temporary difficulty, from which £30,000 would extricate you. In fact, I wrote, as you would say, on the off-chance of his being able to find the money; as to his willingness, I had not a shadow of a doubt, and I did not think you would make the suggestion yourself."

"You are right. I know his noble nature, and I should have shrunk from giving him the pain which the consciousness that we were in a difficulty, and that he could render us no help, would have caused him; for I had not the remotest idea that he either had, or could raise, so large a sum. At the same time, Mr. Auf der Mauer, as things have turned out, I am glad you took it upon you to write, and I thank you heartily for having done so. Sergius Kalougia is the only man in the world, I think, from whom I could receive so great a favour without any sense of humiliation. And yet I feel under the deepest obligation to him for his timely help, and the way in which it has been given. Nothing could have been more generously or delicately done. As to this money being as much mine as his—

rather more, in fact—that is just his wild way of putting it. I shall, of course, repay him, and before very long, I hope; and the loan must carry interest in the usual way. You will please open an account with Mr. Kalougia in the private ledger, and give him credit as from yesterday, with interest at the rate of five per cent.”

“It shall be done at once, Mr. Ryvington. But” (hesitatingly) “do you think Mr. Kalougia will accept interest?”

“Of course he will. I shall insist on that, at any rate. And now I want you to see Cliviger and arrange with him. We take over at once all the cotton that has been bought in our name. I will have nothing whatever to do with him or his combinations; and let the brokers with whom he has financed the cotton be advised by this evening’s post that we, and we alone, are their principals. And look here, Mr. Auf der Mauer, advise Cliviger to keep out of my way, for if I should happen to meet him, I am afraid he would pass a very bad quarter of an hour; and if he shows himself here at Redscar, as sure as he is alive, I will have him ducked in one of the lodges.”

Randle had still another unpleasant task to perform. He had to inform Lord Lindisfarne of his inability to provide the £20,000 for Muriel’s settlement as arranged. True, in the event of the undelivered cotton being resold before delivery (as the market was shaping, a not unlikely contingency), he might be able to spare the money—if he did not repay Kalougia. But he felt that to repay Kalougia at the earliest possible moment was an imperative duty. Until he had discharged this obligation, or was absolutely sure of his ability to do so within a given time, it would not be right to take £20,000 out of the business for his own purposes, and, until the greater part of the cotton they held was actually sold absolute certainty was out of the question.

So he wrote a short, straightforward letter to Lord Lindisfarne, in which, without going into unnecessary detail, he set forth his position, and explained why he would not be able to complete his agreement touching the intended settlement on Lady Muriel. But in the course of a few months, he said—perhaps in a month or two—when the present stress was over—his resources being virtually intact, he should be able to find the money without difficulty. Meanwhile, in order that there might be no postponement of the marriage, he proposed to contract with the trustees under the settlement to pay the £20,000 at a date which he named. This would constitute him a debtor to the trustees for the amount in question, which he offered further to secure by making it a charge on the whole of his interest in the Redscar property.

At the same time, he wrote at length to Lady Muriel telling

her of his troubles during the past week, and of the opportune help he had received from Kalougia (whose letter he sent her), and of the proposition he had made to her father. By return of post, Randle received letters from the earl and his daughter.

Lord Lindisfarne simply expressed his regret that circumstances should have occurred to prevent Randle providing the money as arranged, thanked him for his frank and manly letter, and, as touching his proposal, promised him an answer in the course of a post or two.

Muriel's letter was as long as his own. It was full of sympathy and affection. She felt unspeakably grieved and humiliated, she said, that the course of their true love should be troubled by a question of money; and she was more sorry than she could tell that Randle's anxieties should be increased by the necessity laid on him of providing a settlement for her. She did not want any settlement—was he not all in all to her?—and whatever course her mother might take she would be constant to her troth. Then she went on to say that Lady Lindisfarne was very much annoyed at the difficulty about the £20,000, and that, although her father was quite willing to accept Randle's proposal and let the marriage take place at the time appointed, the countess was not. The countess had repeated her remark about the vicissitudes of business, and insisted that the fact of his failure to find the money for the settlement was a very good reason why the marriage should not take place until he did find it. She even hinted at the expediency of breaking off the engagement, but to this the earl demurred, and in the end, as they could not agree on the answer which should be given to Randle, it was decided to put off answering him until they were both of one mind.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

BY ORDER OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

MEANWHILE Kalougia and Dora had arrived in Switzerland. The afternoon of the day on which Randle received the letters described in the preceding chapter they were at the Hôtel de la Croix, Geneva, in a room overlooking the lake and the Alps, and commanding a view of the Brunswick monument. Kalougia had spent the greater part of the previous day with his friend Antonoff; and several Russian refugees, with whom he had been long in conversation in their own language, had just left him.

He was pacing restlessly to and fro, and Dora was looking at him anxiously, for he seemed disquieted and unhappy.

"What have those men been saying to disturb you so much, Sergius?" asked Dora.

"Yes, I am disturbed, very much disturbed. I am unhappy for my country and the cause. The revolutionists are developing too savage a spirit. They are converting what was a peaceful propaganda into a murderous warfare. They forget that though an assassination destroys an enemy it forfeits sympathy and alienates friends. When I was an active member of the party we refused to sanction—even in principle—the extreme penalty, except in cases of proved treachery, and though several such cases happened among the southern groups, none, up to the time of my imprisonment, had happened in ours. Of course, I do not speak of lives taken in fair fight—in defending ourselves from arrest, or in rescuing our friends who had fallen into the hands of the police. For instance, all the attempts hitherto made on the life of the Tsar have been isolated acts, prompted either by individual fanaticism or private vengeance. But now, unless I misunderstand the hints let drop this morning, the societies have condemned him to death, and are concerting measures to carry out their sentence. I quite admit that there may be circumstances in which tyrannicide is justifiable. Yet I think in this instance they are making a terrible mistake. How do they know that the Tsarewitch may not prove a greater tyrant than his father? And it is quite a sufficient objection to the attempt that it is hardly possible to kill the Tsar without involving in his fate others who are no more responsible for his acts than the Brunswick monument there."

"Oh, Sergius, do you really think they are going to murder the poor man? Can nobody warn him?"

"He has been warned already, or if not he will be. The executive committee will not strike until he has been formally notified of his sentence, if sentence has really been passed, of which, however, I know nothing certain. I am an outsider now, you know. And a long time may elapse between sentence and execution—months, years even. I have profound faith in the cause—the cause of liberty in Russia, I mean—but I begin to fear that its triumph may be delayed by the violence and intemperance of its partisans; yet our people have been terribly provoked. They are suffering more now than ever before, and they look upon the Tsar as the cause of their sufferings. How can you expect prudence, abnegation, and farsightedness from men who have been hunted like wild beasts, who never for an hour together can call their lives and their liberties their own? If Alexander falls, his blood will in a great measure be on his own

head. But he is not bad; he is only weak; and, for the rest, he is what circumstances have made him—as we all are—and his death can no more destroy the system of which he is the head than the fall of an avalanche can destroy a mountain. *Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!*”

“Did you say this to the people who were here just now, Sergius? I cannot remember their names. They are gentlemen, I think.”

“Unquestionably, and well-informed gentlemen. Two of them have been university professors, one is the son of a general in high command. Yes, I talked to them pretty much as I have been talking to you. But while here they are, of course, quite unable to exert any influence on the movement in Russia. They have a general idea of what is going on, or perhaps may even form a shrewd guess what is about to happen; but that is all. The latest arrivals are necessarily the best informed, and it was from Tchernechevski, the general's son, that I gathered what I have been telling you. Antonoff, too, says there are rumours flying about that the executive committee are hatching a plot against the Tsar's life. They are losing their heads, and, as I told Tchernechevski and the others, striking both wildly and blindly. They are trying to achieve the impossible. The first thing to aim at is something like constitutional liberty; when that is obtained it can be used as a lever for effecting further reforms. And the peasants must be educated—that is the most pressing need of all. But they want to do everything at once—make a political revolution and regenerate society by a *coup de main*—at one stroke. They will find it quite work enough, for one generation, to clean out the Augean stable of Russian administration, instruct the ignorant, and extinguish pauperism; and I said so this morning. They simply laughed at me. They think that my sufferings have unstrung my nerves, and that my sojourn in England has sapped the integrity of my revolutionary faith. Perhaps it has; at any rate, I am beginning, like your cousin, to prefer commonplace remedies to heroic methods. Russian revolutionists are going on the opposite tack. They believe that emancipation can be won only by bloodshed and terror; and they are acting according to their belief. I fear there are evil days in store for Russia. But I feel as if I wanted a breath of fresh air, Dora. Shall we have a walk?”

“With all my heart. I am dying for a walk. We have not been out to-day.”

As they passed through the hall of the hotel the concierge told Kalougia that, a few minutes previously, two strangers had been inquiring if he were in the house, and that when asked their business they said they would call again.

"Two of my poor countrymen who want a little help, I suppose," remarked Kalougia; "and if they are decent fellows they shall have it."

Outside, on the opposite side of the street, Dora noticed two men walking slowly, and deeply engaged in conversation—not a very phenomenal sight in Geneva at four o'clock on a summer afternoon; but one of the men in question wore a fur cap so low down on his head as almost to cover his eyes, which, seeing how warm the day had been, was somewhat remarkable. At any rate, Dora thought so, and called her husband's attention to the circumstance. She said it made her head ache to look at the man.

"Don't look at him then, my Dora," laughed Kalougia. "A fur cap has certainly an uncomfortable look on a day like this. There are all sorts and conditions of men in Geneva, you know. Perhaps he is a Tartar, who has never worn any other sort of hat."

They strolled over the island bridge, and after watching for a few minutes the vast volume of the swift-flowing Rhone as it rushes tumultuously under the arches, and sweeps, broad and blue, past the wooded heights of St. John, they made towards the Plainpalais, a wide expanse of turf bordered with trees. At the farther side of it—not far from the point where the Arve, grey with the glacier grindings of the Pennine Alps, joins the Rhone—they turned into a shady avenue of ancient elms which led them to the entrance of the public cemetery.

"Shall we go in?" asked Dora.

"If you like, certainly. Yes, let us go in."

There was nothing remarkable about the cemetery, except that it was surrounded by a magnificent panorama of mountains, and that the epitaphs on the tombs were in various languages—several in Russian, which Kalougia translated for the benefit of his wife.

Once when he did so she noticed that his voice faltered, and, looking up, saw that his eyes were filled with tears.

"What is it, Sergius dear?" she asked. "Was the person who is buried here some friend of yours?"

"No, Dora, he is quite unknown to me; but a cemetery always affects me in this way. I never go into one that it does not cost me an effort to refrain from weeping. I do not mean for the dead—their troubles are over—but for the living. The very air of a burying ground seems to me heavy with tears and blighted hopes, dark with grief and black despair. Oh, my Dora! if I were to lose you, what, what——"

"But we should not be separated for ever, dearest Sergius. We should meet again. I know you did not think so once; but you think so now?"

"Yes, darling," said Kalougia, in a low voice, as he took her hand in his; "you have almost persuaded me to believe in a life beyond the present. I understand now how to some minds immortality is the complement of love, just as love is the complement of life. The one implies the other, they think. And the followers of the mystic Swede have a beautiful theory that life and love are one, and that those who love will never die. Oh, Dora! can it be true that I shall one day see Zeneide and my mother, and that you and I, when we shuffle off this mortal coil, may know and love each other in another state of being? What happiness to believe it! Yet where shall I look for proof, by what sign know that the doctrine is true? That is the question."

"It is beyond positive proof, Sergius. It is a divine mystery, which we must accept in faith. Yet it seems to me that the longing for immortality implanted in every heart, to which nearly all these grave-stones bear witness, is strong evidence that our spirits will never die. If you try to believe, Sergius, I am sure you will end in believing. Look at that poor woman. She believes, and I daresay, although her lot is one of toil and poverty, her faith makes her life tolerable, and even happy."

As she spoke, Dora pointed to a woman engaged in dressing a lowly grave. She was perhaps sixty years old, and the basket on her back and her dress showed that she was a woman of the people. The grave was marked by a single headstone, mantled with ivy, and a box-bordered enclosure in which were growing a few simple flowers. After the woman had trimmed the border and watered the flowers, she knelt down, kissed the stone, crowned it with a garland of *immortelles*, and then walked slowly away. As she passed Kalougia and Dora she raised her eyes, and her face wore a look of quiet happiness that struck them both.

When she was out of sight they went to have a nearer look at the grave on which she had lavished so much loving care. The stone bore the following inscription:—

LUCIE DELMAR
Agée 17.

"Avec le Seigneur demeure en paix, ma bien aimée; prie-le dans sa miséricorde de benir ta mère, et du lui garder une place pres de toi."*

"That was the mother; I am sure it was," exclaimed Dora; "none but a mother would keep the poor girl so long in pious remembrance, and tend her grave so lovingly. See, she has been dead nearly twenty years. What do you think of that for faith,

* "Dwell with the Lord in peace, my darling; beseech Him in His mercy to bless thy mother, and to keep a place for her near thee."

Sergius? This is no Catholic grave, bear in mind, the epitaph is no stereotyped form dictated by a priest. It is the spontaneous outpouring of a mother's heart. Do you think she is mistaken—that the faith which is the consolation of her life is an illusion, and her hope of meeting her child beyond the grave a baseless dream?”

“So far from thinking so, I would not for the world attempt to deprive her of that which you rightly call the consolation of her life,” replied Kalougia, earnestly. “How can I prove she is wrong—what could I give her better? And Dora, dearest, the greatest philosopher among us might well exchange his philosophy for that poor woman's simple faith. Her foolishness is better than our wisdom.”

And then they continued their walk among the tombs in silence; both for the moment feeling more disposed for thought than discourse. Dora was well satisfied with the turn the conversation had taken. Like nearly all continental Liberals—whether wild Socialists or sane politicians—Kalougia (before his arrival in England) had come to look upon religion as a superstition identified with priesthood and tyranny, and like them to be opposed and denounced. Of late, however, especially since his marriage, his views had much altered, and his acquired scepticism seemed to be yielding to the influence of his wife and his surroundings, acting on the religious impressibility of his temperament, the existence of which Randle had long ago discerned. But never before had he gone so far or admitted so much; for the immortality of the soul was his great stumbling block. If he could accept that, he said, minor difficulties would vanish; and from his manner Dora drew more encouragement than from his words. She little knew how priceless a consolation the recollection of that visit to the cemetery would prove to her before the rise of another sun.

As they were walking up the avenue of elms on their way back to the hotel, Dora gave a sudden start and uttered a half-frightened exclamation.

“Oh, Sergius, just look there; if there isn't the man in the fur cap again!”

“So there is,” said Kalougia, eyeing the fellow curiously. “What does he want here, I wonder? If I could conceive any reason why anybody here should want to watch me, I should almost think he was a spy. But it is probably only a coincidence. Geneva is not a big place; there is nothing extraordinary in seeing the same individual twice within a few hours.”

In the evening they went to the theatre to see Verdi's opera of “Aïda.” The music was beautiful, and the acting and singing were all that could be desired; but the conclusion was melancholy

in the extreme. Radames, the hero and an Egyptian general, is beloved by Aïda, the captive daughter of an Ethiopian king, and loves her in return. After winning a great victory for his country, Radames, under the influence of his passion, commits an indiscretion which draws upon him the hatred of the priests, whose power is greater even than that of the King of Egypt. They seize him, judge him, and condemn him to be buried alive in a crypt of the temple of Isis. Aïda, anticipating her lover's fate, conceals herself in the crypt, and at the moment when the stone, which cuts him off from life and hope, is lowered into its place, she throws herself into his arms, and as the priests in the temple overhead chant their death-song, dies at his feet.

"Oh, how sad!" exclaimed Dora, when the end came. "It makes me shudder. Let us go, Sergius dear."

In returning to their hotel, they had to pass over the Pont de l'Isle, the same which they had traversed a few hours previously on their way to the cemetery. They were more than half way across it, and were just about to turn into the street called the Quai des Bergues, which borders the Rhone, when Kaloungia was startled a second time by an exclamation from his wife.

"Oh, that man again, Sergius," she said; "he really haunts us. I am sure he is after no good. What can he want? Let us hurry home, dearest."

"There is nothing to be alarmed about, my Dora. The man is certainly a spy; there can be no mistake about that now. He is watching us. I suppose the Russian secret police here think I have come to Geneva for some political purpose. Let them watch me. It is disagreeable, certainly, but it does one no real harm. And see, the fellow has gone on; he has disappeared. We shall perhaps never see him again."

"I shall be very glad if we don't," said Dora, fervently; "he makes me uncomfortable every time I see him."

The air was balmy, the night, though moonless, was fine; millions of stars looked down on the silent lake and foaming river, and they walked slowly onward—pausing often by the way—for there was a fascination in the semi-obscurity, in the music of the waters, and in the veiled beauty of the scene around them that charmed them both.

"We are nearly at home, now," said Dora, as they reached an archway a few yards from the hotel. "I don't know when I enjoyed a walk so much. See, Sergius, how the stars gleam in the lake and how large the mountains loom in the darkness. What a beautiful night!"

The words were hardly spoken when she heard behind her the sound of a stealthy footstep. Looking round she saw a

shadowy form rush swiftly from the archway—saw something bright flash in the darkness. With a quick movement and a piercing scream she threw up her arm, yet not in time to prevent the assassin's dagger from striking Sergius between the shoulders.

"Oh, Dora, they have killed me!" he cried, as he fell heavily forward. But she threw her arms round him, and by leaning against the wall managed to sustain his weight.

"*A moi, à moi, au secours!*" she cried.

The next moment two or three passers-by and a gendarme came running to her help. They supported Kalougia in their arms and carried him to the hotel. Dora, dazed and tearless, walked by her husband's side, holding his pulseless hand in hers.

"Who has done this?" asked the gendarme.

"A man in a fur cap," said Dora, "he has been following us about all day."

When the gendarme, with the commissioner of the quarter, who had been sent for in all haste, went back to the archway, they found lying on the ground the dagger with which the foul deed had been done. Round the handle was wrapped a piece of paper on which, rudely written in French, were these words:

"BY ORDER OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE."

CHAPTER LXIX.

A NIGHT ALARM.

SOME three hours later, Red Ryvington, lying asleep in his bed at Redscar, was roused by the ringing of a bell, followed by a tapping at his chamber door, and a barking of dogs.

"Yes, what is it?" he exclaimed drowsily.

"The front door bell has rung twice within the last few minutes. I'm afraid there's something wrong," said his mother's voice.

"What can it be?" asked Randle, now fully awake, as he sprang out of bed and put on his dressing gown.

"I'm afraid there's something wrong at the factories. One of them is on fire, perhaps."

"That cannot be. They would ring the big bell if it were. I will go down and see."

Randle found his mother on the landing folded in her wrapper; two or three frightened and night-capped maids were peeping over the balusters, while Bob, protruding a dishevelled

head from a half-open door, inquired if he should bring his revolver.

"Yes, Robert, you had better," said his mother, "perhaps it is a burglar."

"Burglars don't ring before they come in," answered Randle, with a smile, and taking the candle which she offered him he went downstairs.

"You cannot tell, they perhaps might, some people are wicked enough for anything. Take your revolver and go after him, Robert," said Mrs. Ryvington, earnestly.

When Randle opened the door he found standing before it a small boy with a telegram. It was addressed to himself, and thus expressed:—

"They have killed him; he is dying. Oh, come to me.

"DORA."

Randle without speaking a word, went slowly upstairs, holding the despatch in his hand.

"A telegram! It is bad news; I can see by your face it is," exclaimed his mother. "Where is it from?"

"From Geneva," gasped Randle, whom the shock had almost deprived of the power of utterance.

It was no use trying to minimise evil tidings with his mother; he gave her the despatch.

"My poor Dora, my poor stricken lamb," cried Mrs. Ryvington. "May the Lord have pity on her! Oh, Randle, my mind misgave me when they went abroad. I feared some ill would befall them. I did, I did. What will you do? you will set off to-day, won't you?"

"At once. I shall drive to Manchester and catch the nine o'clock train to London, travel to Paris by the night mail, and reach Geneva, I hope, to-morrow night. Robert, ring the bell for Kenyon, and tell him to get the carriage ready. And go down to the counting-house; there is money in the safe. Bring me fifty pounds. As you pass Auf der Mauer's lodgings ask him to come here. I should like a word with him before I go."

"Randle, I shall go with you," said Mrs. Ryvington, quietly yet firmly.

"You go with me! Impossible. Think of your age; and you are not very strong at present. It will be a hard, long journey, and you are not a good traveller, remember."

"It does not matter, Randle, I shall go. That poor girl must not be left in her trouble without one of her own sex to speak a word of comfort to her. As for the journey, the Lord will give me strength."

"Very well, mother," said her son, after a minute's thought,

seeing she was determined. "You shall go with me. But you must have breakfast first. Let the servants make some, and get your things ready, for we must be away in an hour."

Randle found time in Manchester to telegraph to Dora that he and his mother were *en route*, and at what time they expected to be at Geneva. At the same time he sent a telegram to Muriel saying that he would call at Grosvenor Square about four o'clock, and another to one of the whips of his party asking that gentleman to provide another pair for him.

On reaching London they drove to Charing Cross Hotel, where Red Ryvington left his mother while he went to see Muriel. She was anxiously awaiting his arrival; for in his message he had mentioned having received bad news from Dora, and that he was on his way to Geneva.

"Oh, Randle," she exclaimed, when she had read his cousin's fateful telegram. "Poor Mr. Kalougia—only just married! This will kill her; she will die, too."

"I hope not. Still it will go hard with her, I fear. She has a tender heart, and loved her husband so passionately. And I too loved him; he was a noble fellow, a true friend. This is a terrible blow."

"My poor Randle! you are being sorely tried," said Muriel, as she gently stroked the hair from his forehead. "How pale you are, and your eyes show how you are troubled. It has been very hard for you since you went away, dearest."

"Yes, my darling. I have gone through a great deal since we parted. But this is the worst of all. The other was an anxiety, a danger; this is an irreparable misfortune. I almost dread meeting Dora. I am glad my mother is going with me. Her presence will be a great comfort to the poor girl."

"Your mother going with you! Where is she?"

"I left her at the hotel to rest for an hour or two before we continue our journey."

"How good of her to go with you! I shall call upon her, Randle. You will take me to see your mother, will you not?"

Randle gladly acquiesced in this proposal. Though he had not liked to hint as much, he knew that a visit from her would be very gratifying to his mother, and he felt deeply grateful to Muriel for the quickness with which she had divined his wishes and the delicacy with which she had made the suggestion. He was just then in a mood to be sensitive about seeming trifles, and he saw in the incident another proof of the worth and affection of his betrothed.

Muriel then told him that her mother and Maude were at Richmond, but that her father (to whom she had shown her lover's telegram) was at home, and had expressed a wish to see

him. On this, as time was running short, they both went to Lord Lindisfarne's room.

The earl shook Randle cordially by the hand, and began at once to speak about his journey to Geneva and its cause.

"I am truly sorry," he said, "not only for your cousin's sake, but for Dr. Kalougia. I liked him, notwithstanding his strange opinions. But really I can hardly believe, as this telegram you have received seems to imply, that they have murdered him."

"There is no mistake about that, I am afraid," answered Randle, sadly. "Dora distinctly says they have killed him, that he is dead."

"No; that he is dying. I see a gleam of hope in that. He was clearly not dead when that message was despatched. While there is life there is hope, you know. People recover from terrible wounds sometimes, and Kalougia was a very temperate man, I think. That will count greatly in his favour."

This was a view of the question that had not previously occurred to Red Ryvington, and he admitted the fact pointed out by the peer did perhaps afford some slight ground for hope.

"Who do you suppose the 'they' are Mrs. Kalougia mentions here, Lord Lindisfarne? I cannot, for the life of me, conceive why any one at Geneva should want to murder Kalougia."

"Some of those Nihilist fellows, no doubt. They swarm at Geneva, and they are frightful scoundrels, I believe."

"But Sergius has not mixed himself up in politics for years—not since some considerable time before he left Russia, in fact."

"Perhaps they wanted him to do so, and he would not. At any rate, I shall be very glad if you will telegraph us fully as soon as you reach Geneva. Say whether poor Kalougia is alive or not, and why and by whom his life has been attempted. You leave by the night express, I suppose?"

Randle answered in the affirmative, and said that his mother was with him, and that Muriel had kindly offered to call upon her.

"Mrs. Ryvington in London," said the earl. "Then I must pay my respects to her. I will go with you, Muriel."

Randle returned at once to his hotel, and half an hour after his arrival thither Lord Lindisfarne and his daughter made their promised visit, accompanied Mrs. Ryvington and her son to the platform, and remained with them until the train was in motion.

Before they parted the earl took Randle aside.

"I wanted to tell you," he said "that I consider your proposal about the settlement satisfactory. The lawyers say the arrangement you offer to make will be quite legal and binding;

and, if I have confidence in your ability to carry it out, they advise me to accept it. I need hardly say I have confidence; I am sure you would not enter into an engagement which you are not prepared to fulfil. Lady Lindisfarne is certainly not altogether of my opinion, and—but never mind that. Ladies cannot always have their own way, you know, and I mean to have mine this time. I thought I would mention this before you went. It may be a little weight off your mind, and you are having rather an anxious time of it just now.”

Randle warmly expressed his sense of the earl's kindness, and then observed that if Kalougia were really dead, of which he feared there was hardly the shadow of a doubt, he thought he would like the marriage to be deferred for a while; for, though Sergius was only a cousin's husband, the affection for each other had been almost more than fraternal, and Dora and himself had always been to each other as sister and brother.

“The feeling does you honour, Ryvington,” said Lord Lindisfarne. “I quite understand it, and fully agree with you. Let the question be an open one until you return from Geneva. Pending further information, I shall continue to hope that the worst has not happened.”

Randle, in an “aside” with Muriel, told her what had passed between her father and himself. She seemed very much pleased.

“Dear papa! he is always good, and you are a great favourite of his. But I quite agree with you. We could not be married while your poor cousin is in the depth of her grief. But I am like papa; I cannot believe that Mr. Kalougia is dead. It is really too terrible to be true.”

And then a few more words were said which brought back a little colour to Randle's pallid cheeks, and some of the old light to his eyes; and he went on his way with the weight of sorrow and apprehension which he had brought with him from Redscar perceptibly lightened.

CHAPTER LXX.

MADAME LA PRINCESSE.

THE travellers reached Geneva late on the following night.

On entering the Hôtel de la Croix, they were received with effusive politeness by a gentleman—probably the manager or secretary—with elaborately curled and richly perfumed jet black hair and whiskers—the former beautifully parted in the middle—bejewelled fingers, and a fat face crumpled with constant

smiling. He spoke English fluently, but as the construction of his sentences was occasionally somewhat mixed, and he made a free use of foreign words, his meaning was not always quite as clear as might have been desired.

"Mr. and Madame Ryvington!" exclaimed this individual, making a low bow, and washing his hands energetically with invisible soap and imperceptible water. "Good evening, monsieur and madame. Your rooms have been commanded, numbers 43, 44, and 45, to the second. Will you be elevated in the hoist?"

"Madame Kalougia ordered the rooms, I suppose?"

"Perfectly, monsieur."

"And"—Randle was almost afraid of asking the question—"is her husband——"

"Monsieur le Prince still lives," answered the manager, who was by no means dull of apprehension, often, indeed, answering questions before they were well asked.

"Whom do you mean by 'Monsieur le Prince?'" asked Randle, sharply. "I was asking about Monsieur Kalougia."

"Perfectly; I understand. Monsieur still lives, thanks to the devotion of Madame la Princesse."

"Madame la Princesse!" muttered Randle. "What can the fellow mean?"

Then addressing the manager:

"We will go to our rooms for a few minutes, and if Madame Kalougia will receive us we should like to see her at once, please."

"Perfectly. I will make Madame la Princesse know that you are arrived, and demand if she will receive you; then I will make myself mount with you in the elevator and make you see your rooms."

"Madame la Princesse?" said Randle to himself. "The man is mad."

The manager had hardly ushered Red Ryvington and his mother into their rooms when a servant came and whispered something in his ear.

"Madame la Princesse will be happy to receive you at once. She attends you in her salon, and she hopes you will drink with her a cup of tea."

"You have been drinking something a good deal stronger than tea," thought Red Ryvington; "that is quite clear."

"Whom do you mean by Madame la Princesse?" he asked. "It is Madame Kalougia I want to see."

"Precisely, Monsieur Ree-vang-ton. Madame la Princesse Kalougia."

"The fellow is certainly crazed," muttered Randle; "or

perhaps it is a way they have here." Then aloud, "We shall be ready to go to Madame Kalougia's room in two or three minutes. Perhaps you will kindly wait and show us the way."

The manager, who was nothing if not polite, waited accordingly, and, when Mrs. Ryvington and her son were ready, conducted them to a room in another wing of the building.

Their conductor knocked with his bejewelled fingers at the door. A voice they well knew said "Entrez," and the next moment they were in Dora's presence. She was very pale, and her eyes were weary with watching; but there was nothing in her look or attitude that denoted either lack of courage or loss of hope, and when she caught sight of her aunt and cousin her face brightened with pleasure.

Mrs. Ryvington ran forward and clasped her niece in her arms.

"Oh, thank God, Dora, it is not as we feared! That man told us the truth. Sergius is not dead; I can see by your face he is not."

"He is not, aunt; and he will live. He is still very weak, but out of danger. And I," said the girl, exultingly, "I saved his life. When I sent you that telegram I had given up hope; I thought he was dying. I sent you another a few hours later to say there was hope. Perhaps you did not receive it?"

"It would not reach Redscar until after we had left," said Randle. "But how did the frightful thing happen, Dora? Who is it that has been trying to kill Sergius?"

"You are right in calling it a frightful thing, Randle," answered Dora, with a shudder. "It has been terrible. I will tell you all—all I know—if you are not too tired to listen."

"If you are not too tired to tell us, Dora, I am sure we are not too tired to listen."

After telling how her husband had been struck down as they returned from the theatre, she continued:

"When they brought Sergius into the hotel he was quite unconscious, and as pale as death. Everybody thought he was dying. The doctor who first came said he feared the wound was mortal, and in that case, if the bleeding went on, he could not long survive. For a minute or two I felt as if I were losing my senses; and then, like a flash, there came into my mind something that Sergius had said only the day before about the transfusion of blood. There was a surgeon at Geneva he told me—in this very street—whose writings on the best methods of transfusing blood had won him a European reputation, and who had invented the best apparatus for the purpose in existence. He meant to call on him before we left Geneva. I sent for this surgeon—Dr. Clausel, he is called—at once. Almost the

moment he saw Sergius he said the only means of preventing a fatal result was by a transfusion, so as to keep him alive until the bleeding could be stopped. The blood was taken from my arm, and my husband was saved."

"Poor Dora!" murmured Mrs. Ryvington, compassionately. "What a trial!"

"It was not so very terrible, aunt. As Dr. Clausel said, the loss of a few ounces of blood can harm nobody in good health; and I would have given my life for Sergius. When they examined the wound they found that the dagger had just missed touching any vital part. The blow was well aimed, but my arm, they think, must have turned the dagger a little aside."

"So you have saved his life twice over, Dora. I suppose he is still very weak, though?"

"Very. He is always quite still, and speaks only in a whisper. Nobody but the nurses and myself, besides the doctors, can see him for the present. Perhaps you may see him to-morrow, though. I will ask Dr. Clausel when he comes in the morning."

"They have caught that scoundrel, I hope; the fellow in the fur cap, I mean."

"They have not found a trace of him. The police are quite puzzled. M. Cartier—he is the head of the detective department, I think—has been to see me several times. He is coming again in the morning, and will perhaps have something to tell us. He is such a nice old gentleman, not at all like a detective, and so intelligent."

"There is one thing more that I want to ask you before we separate, Dora," said Randle, after some further conversation. "That fool of a manager, or whatever he is, spoke of you several times as 'Madame la Princesse,' and of Sergius as Prince Kalougia. What did he mean by it, do you think?"

"He meant what he said," answered Dora, with her old roguish smile. "The man was quite right."

"Nonsense!"

"Oh! but it is quite true, I assure you. Sergius is Prince Sergius Kalougia, and I am Madame la Princesse." (Here she rose from her chair and made a stately obeisance.)

"But, Dora, this is quite bewildering. How is it you never told us before?"

"For a very good reason—because I did not know it myself. It is all very simple. Sergius comes of a princely family. He was born a prince. But you know what peculiar notions he has about equality and that. When he left Russia he left the prince behind him, and called himself, wherever he went, simply Sergius Kalougia. He thought it more democratic, and it spared him a

great many troublesome attentions. At Redscar he found another reason for not disclosing his title. He heard—from Bob, I think—the particulars of my father's will, and that I had made up my mind not to marry a man with a title; and he naturally did not desire it to be supposed that he wanted to marry me for my fortune. I only learned this at Paris. There were some Russians at the hotel we stayed at who knew him, and then he told me. He was also known here. He would have told me—told us all—sooner, only he feared that in the circumstances, being a stranger and that, his motives might be misconstrued. As if anybody who knew Sergius could possibly misconstrue his motives."

"I never knew such a thing in all my life—never!" exclaimed Mrs. Ryvington, rubbing her spectacles with unwonted energy, "I can hardly believe it. Dear me, aunt to a princess, and going to be mother-in-law to an earl's daughter! But I thought a way would be opened. I always thought a way would be opened."

"A way to what, mother?" asked Randle, who, though he generally apprehended her metaphors quickly enough, did not quite understand at the moment what she was driving at.

"I never thought the Lord would let your cousin Randle come into the property. It's a mysterious dispensation, I know, but I thought a way would be opened, and I was right," answered Mrs. Ryvington, complacently, as she replaced her spectacles.

"Of course," said Randle. "That is a circumstance which in my excitement I had overlooked. The estate is yours now, Dora."

"If I choose to take it. If my brother had not behaved so badly he might have had it all. As it is I do not think he ought to have more than half—do you?"

"Not even that. I am afraid it would do him no good; he is far from steady and very extravagant; and I fear he would soon run through it. Make him an allowance if you like, but keep the property in your own hands."

"Perhaps you are right; at any rate we need not decide at present. We can talk about that afterwards when Sergius is better."

"By all means. There is no need for hurry, and it is a matter that wants thinking about. At the same time I think your brother should be informed, if only to give him a chance of breaking off with Lady Conacre."

"But he cannot, they are engaged."

"There will be no difficulty about that, I fancy," rejoined Red Ryvington, with a smile. "When her ladyship knows

there is nothing to be got by marrying him, marry him she will not—she will be the first to renounce the engagement. On that you may depend.”

“In that case we must by all means let my brother know. I am sure I don’t want him to marry Lady Conacre, although he richly deserves to do. But we need not write at once. The marriage does not take place for three weeks, you know.”

“Yes,” acquiesced Randle, “it will be time enough next week, and until I have had some conversation with Sergius I shall not be in a position to state positively—in my capacity as trustee, you know—that you really are a princess.”

“Oh, you shall have an abundance of proof, old Ran; but we do not intend to be Prince and Princess at Whitebrook for all that. And now let us say good night; aunt is quite worn out, and you look very tired.”

Tired though Randle was, he sent off a long telegram to Muriel before going to bed.

CHAPTER LXXI.

REVELATIONS.

DORA, as she had anticipated, was waited upon next morning by M. Cartier, of the Geneva detective police service. She introduced him to Randle, who would, she said, act as her representative, and to whom she requested him to communicate any further facts that he might have gathered in the course of his investigation. The doctors were expected every moment, she must remain with her husband, but Mr. Ryvington would inform her afterwards what had passed.

M. Cartier was a gentleman past middle age, with tangled grey hair and a rugged, yet intelligent, countenance, and so benevolent-looking withal that his general appearance was rather that of a parson than a policeman. He had a fair knowledge of English, so that Randle and he were enabled to converse without difficulty. The former’s first inquiry was naturally whether anything had been heard of the would-be murderer or not.

“Nothing whatever,” said M. Cartier; “and it is very strange, for we have spared no effort. The police, both here and across the border, are making the most active exertions. Madame la Princesse has offered a reward of 20,000 francs for the apprehension of the assassins; such a reward was never offered in Geneva before. There is no lack of zeal, I assure you. What makes the affair so remarkable is, that within half an

hour of the attempt being made, a hot pursuit was begun. The railway stations were watched, our most trusty agents placed on the alert, the roads leading to the frontier beset; we telegraphed descriptions of the men to the French police at Bellegarde and Pontarlier and other places, and notified them of the magnificent reward offered by Madame la Princesse. It is truly incredible; they must have sunk underground."

"They? Was more than one man concerned in the attempt, then?"

"We think there are two. The man in the fur cap was observed by several people both on the day of the attempt and previously; and he was often in company with another man, a description of whom we also possess. Now both have disappeared. The conclusion is inevitable. They are confederates, and they are together."

"But what can have been their motive? Why did they want to murder Mr.—Prince Kalougia?"

"Madame la Princesse, she has told you about the finding of the dagger and the paper?"

"Yes. But that does not seem to make the matter much clearer. Why should the executive committee desire M. Kalougia's death?"

"Madame has perhaps not told you of the letter?"

"What letter?"

"A letter she received yesterday in Russian. I have had it translated. Behold the translation."

The letter was to the effect that Sergius Kalougia had been condemned to death by the committee because he was suspected of having applied to the Tsar for permission to return to Russia with the intention of making a full confession of his connection with the revolutionary movement, and revealing the details of its organisation and the names of the Nihilist leaders.

"But that is utterly absurd. Nobody who knows Sergius Kalougia could possibly suspect him of conduct so atrocious. He is not the stuff traitors are made of. Where does this letter come from?"

"It purports to come from St. Petersburg. But don't you see that it may be a device?"

"How?"

"It may have been written to throw us off the scent."

"Then you do not think this letter emanates from the executive committee at all, or that they are in any way connected with the attempt?"

"I would not affirm that too absolutely," said M. Cartier. "These Nihilists are an unaccountable sort of people. They are not to be judged by ordinary rules. But I regard the paper

found with the dagger, and this letter, as nothing at all. It requires to be proved that they are genuine; and if it were a common case I should look upon them as almost certain proof that the persons to whom the crime is imputed are precisely the persons who did not commit it. Moreover, we are in the presence of two theories—perhaps three.”

“Two theories! You have heard something more, then?”

“I have. When I read that letter I communicated with some of the leading Nihilist refugees here, one of whom only left St. Petersburg a fortnight ago, and was himself a member of the executive committee. All indignantly deny that the committee or any other revolutionary society had any reason for desiring M. Kalougia's death, or that they are privy to the attempt on his life. They say that the real authors of the attempt are the *Fraternité Sacrée*—the Holy Brotherhood.”

“The Holy Brotherhood? Who are the Holy Brotherhood?”

“Ah, you don't know. The Holy Brotherhood is a secret society of Russian Royalists, formed for the purpose of combating Nihilism with its own weapons. One of these weapons is said to be assassination. Leading Nihilists and other refugees who may have rendered themselves particularly obnoxious to the brotherhood are secretly condemned to death and executed by the society's emissaries. This is what I have heard, at least. I have myself no proof of the existence of this society. At the same time, I am bound to say that a colleague of mine, a *sous-chef* of the detective department of the French police, who probably knows more about secret societies than any other man in Europe, and whom I have consulted, quite believes in the Holy Brotherhood.”

“Still, M. Cartier,” rejoined Randle, “I do not see how this brings us any nearer to a solution. Assume that the Holy Brotherhood does exist, what then? Why should they attack Kalougia? He has long ceased to be a Nihilist, if ever he was one. He has faithfully kept his promise not to meddle with politics, and has lately been living quietly in England, as I can personally testify. What can they have against him?—why do they want to kill him? Until that point is explained, we are as much in the dark as ever.”

“Precisely, and this is the point I am coming to. I am told—for this is all hearsay, remember—I am told that the brotherhood have adjudged Prince Sergius Kalougia to death because he has broken, or is suspected to have broken, one of the conditions on which he was set free.”

“I don't believe it,” said Randle, warmly. “He has not meddled with politics at all; he has been most guarded. The charge is false, M. Cartier.”

"It is not that; it is something very different," said the officer, drily. "Did he ever tell you what befell him in prison?"

"Yes. He told me about his life in prison; how he was confined in a damp cell and so insufficiently fed that some of his teeth dropped out—that is the reason he has to wear a gold plate in the front of his mouth—how he fell ill, was taken to the hospital, and managed to escape; how he gave himself up and was eventually released."

"That is all? He never told you about being put to the torture?"

"Put to the torture!" exclaimed Randle, aghast. "You surely don't mean that—you cannot mean that—"

"I mean," interposed M. Cartier, "that Prince Sergius Kalougia was put to the torture to make him reveal the names of the confederates by whose help he escaped from prison."

"Great Heaven, is such a thing possible? Yet now, when I think of it, he did say that something had happened to him when in prison that he could not tell us, that he had sworn not to reveal."

"Precisely; that was it, no doubt."

"But how do you come to know this, M. Cartier? I am sure poor Sergius has kept his word. If he had told anybody he would have told me."

"I, too, am quite sure, Mr. Ryvington, that he has kept his word. I obtained my information from a newspaper. A few weeks ago the Nihilist journal, the *Popular Will*, published a full account of the torturing of Prince Kalougia, and their account has been reproduced in the Nihilist organ published here."

"And how did the Nihilists get to know?"

"As they get to know a great many other things—through their confederates. They have confederates in the Third Section itself; some of them even are members of the secret police."

"I begin to understand now. The Government would naturally not want it to be known that they had been guilty of such a frightful act of cruelty."

"Not so much the Government—if you mean the Tsar, for I am sure he knows nothing of this—as the police. When the Tsar ordered M. Kalougia to be set at liberty, those who had caused him to be put to the torture feared that he might expose them and thereby discredit the Russian administration in European opinion, besides compromising them with the Emperor. So, before releasing the prince, they made him swear not to reveal what had passed."

"You think that the Holy Brotherhood, being of opinion that the account published in the *Popular Will* emanated from M. Kalougia, resolved to punish him for his supposed perjury with death?"

"Possibly. But there may be another reason. The statements of the *Popular Will* prove nothing. They may be denied, and doubtless have been denied, but so long as the prince lives he may be called upon to confirm them. If the matter should come to the Tsar's ears, for instance, he might release M. Kalougia from his oath, and authorise him to tell everything."

"I see. They wanted to put him out of the way, on the principle that dead men tell no tales."

"Exactly; but you will please remember that this is all hypothesis and inference, which may be more or less mistaken. The only fact we have at present to go upon is that the life of Prince Kalougia has been attempted by an individual of whom we know nothing whatever, and whom we have not yet succeeded in taking. If we only lay hands on him the mystery will speedily be unravelled."

"You think he will confess?"

"I do think so," said M. Cartier, significantly.

"You surely don't mean to torture him?" exclaimed Randle, in a tone of horror.

"Oh no, we don't do anything of that sort in Switzerland now. But I must tell you that we have a very clever *juge d'instruction* here. For worming a guilty secret out of a man there is not his equal in all Europe."

"I see. Cross-examination and solitary confinement, I suppose; that is very effective, but it is torture, nevertheless. But about Prince Kalougia, M. Cartier. Have you any idea in what way M. Kalougia was tortured? Do they really keep racks and thumbscrews in Russian prisons?"

"Oh, dear, no; racks and thumbscrews are like bows and arrows—they are obsolete. The prince was tortured by electricity."

"The demons! Ah, I understand their object. By means of electricity they can convulse a man's body with agony, yet leave on it no external marks of violence. Poor Sergius! how terribly he must have suffered, and how bravely he bore his sufferings! With all their devilish ingenuity, his tormentors did not succeed in wringing from him a single avowal."

"If the Tsar had not ordered his release, though, they would have killed him in the end—at least, the *Popular Will* says so."

"I have not a doubt of it. No man, even if he were much stronger than M. Kalougia, could long outlive the exquisite torture which electricity can be made to inflict."

"When shall I see you again?" continued Red Ryvington, as M. Cartier rose to take his leave.

"Not before I have something more to tell you. Perhaps tomorrow—perhaps in two or three days. *Au plaisir de vous revoir*, Mr. Ryvington."

When Randle, an hour later, saw Dora, she told him that the doctor's opinion of Sergius was favourable, and that he might see him for a few minutes in the afternoon.

CHAPTER LXXII.

LOST IN THE RHONE.

FOUR days after Red Ryvington's arrival at Geneva, Kalougia had gained so much strength that the interdict on conversation was removed, and the doctors allowed him to sit and talk with his friend. The patient was still very weak, for he had lost much blood, but the wound was doing well, and all the feverish symptoms had disappeared.

Randle imparted to his friend all he had heard from M. Cartier (whom he had not seen since their first interview), and asked his opinion as to the two theories which the chief of the detective department had propounded. Kalougia without hesitation attributed the attempt on his life to the Holy Brotherhood. It was absurd on the face of it, he said, to ascribe the attempt to the executive committee. It was not likely that, after undergoing cruel sufferings rather than betray his comrades and those who had helped him to escape, he should voluntarily propose to disclose their secrets and give their names to the Russian Government. They knew him too well to believe that he could be guilty of so base an act. Moreover, if he had wanted to play the traitor it would not have been necessary for him to go to St. Petersburg for that purpose. A letter through the post or an interview with the Russian ambassador in London would have been quite as effectual and much safer.

"I know very little of the Holy Brotherhood," said the prince, in answer to a remark made by Randle; "but I know something of the men who are believed to be connected with it. Several of them are capable of anything; and the members of the Third Section, who were cognisant of the treatment I received in prison, have the strongest motive for desiring my destruction, as M. Cartier seems to have found out."

"You think that the two bodies are connected, then?"

"Of course they are connected. The brotherhood is simply

a creation of the Third Section. Do you imagine that such an organisation could exist without the sanction and active connivance of the police? The ways of despotism are dark and crooked, my friend. The first thought of a despotic ruler is necessarily the preservation of his authority, as the first thought of his agents is necessarily the retention of their places. The interest of the nation is only secondary. The final argument of a minister when recommending to the Tsar a measure, a policy, or a war, is that the interest of his dynasty demands it, and the argument is one which his majesty never resists. In the same way, his servants offer a determined opposition to every proposal for the reform of a system of which they are a part, and with which they identify their interests. They treat reformers as the Roman emperors treated the early Christians, as the Roman Catholic Church once treated heretics; or, to adduce a more modern instance, as the slave owners of the United States treated abolitionists. This is why so many enlightened Russians, whose instincts are naturally conservative, have come to the conclusion that reform without revolution is impossible; that for so gigantic an evil the remedy must be radical. People say that Russia is not fit for constitutional rule—that the alternative of autocracy is anarchy. They are wrong. I know our peasants; and, though they are not as intelligent as your English working classes, they are little, if at all, inferior in shrewdness to the peasants of France. They are quite capable of choosing men in whom they have confidence to represent them in a legislative or, if that should be thought too strong a measure in the beginning, a deliberative assembly. But it is idle to discuss the point. Nobody who knows Russia believes that even that first step towards freedom will be taken save as the consequence of a successful revolution."

As to what had befallen him in prison, Kalougia was more reserved than Randle had expected. While unable to deny the substantial accuracy of the account in the *Popular Will*, he did not consider that the revelation freed him from the obligation of his oath.

"Besides," he added, with a shudder, "the subject is so very painful to me—the mere thought of what I endured is agony—that I do not think I could bear to talk about it. Let us talk about something else, my friend—about yourself, your plans, and Bedscar."

Randle profited by this opening to repeat the thanks he had already expressed by letter for the timely help that the prince had so generously afforded him—help without which the firm of Ryvington and Sons might have failed to weather the storm. Words, he said, were powerless to express his sense of Kalougia's

kindness, and nothing he could ever do would be sufficient to discharge the debt of gratitude which he owed him.

"And yet you begin by proposing to do me a positive unkindness," observed Kalougia, with a smile, in which, however, there was more of earnest than of jest.

"Proposing to do you an unkindness!" rejoined Red Ryvington, in great surprise. "What do you mean, Sergius?"

"You say in your letter that you intend to pay me interest—five per cent., was it not? I think five per cent. is one of the most revered of your minor English divinities."

"But what is your objection? Why should I not pay you interest?"

"Because I am not a usurer, Randle. Because I would rather lose my right hand than profit by my friend's necessity. Because I know that if I were in need you would do to me as I have done to you."

"But," urged Randle, rather taken aback by this very uncommercial view of the matter, "I am employing your money in my business. It is of great service to us. How can it be wrong to pay you something for the use of it? It seems to me it would be wrong not to do so."

"Look on this picture, my friend. It is night. I am driving, amid fast-falling snow, through one of our Russian forests. The trees are bending to the blast. In the intervals of the storm can be heard the terrible howlings of hungry wolves, eager for the hunt of death. As I pass on I see something in the snow. It is an overturned sledge. Near it stands a traveller; his horses are utterly exhausted. If he remains where he is one half hour longer, he will either perish of cold or become the prey of wild beasts. I offer him a place beside me; I give him a cloak, and take him to a place of safety. What should I say to that man, do you think, if he proposed to pay me for the hire of my sledge and the use of my cloak?"

"But the circumstances are quite different," pleaded Randle. "It is quite true that you helped me in my need; but don't you see that I profit—commercially, I mean—by your money, and it is only right that I should give you a part of my profit?"

"No, my friend," said the prince, quietly, yet firmly, "I will not take any interest from you, neither will I take back the principal."

"No, no, Sergius; I cannot suffer that. You must take it back. In two or three months I shall really have no further need of it."

"Well, then, we must try to do good with the money in some other way. I have already thought of a plan. It shall be put into trust—I think that is the term—and the interest arising

therefrom devoted to the higher education of poor Whitebrook youths of promise, such as your *protégé* Bentley. What do you think of that?"

"I say it is a splendid idea and a noble gift," replied Randle, warmly. "I do not think the money could be put to a better use."

"Good. You will help me to carry the idea out, then?"

"With all my heart," said Red Ryvington, who now saw his way to clearing his commercial conscience by paying, if not interest, at least something in lieu thereof. "You will make all Whitebrook your debtor."

"Whitebrook has done a great deal for me," rejoined Kalougia. "It is time for me to do something for Whitebrook."

Here Dora entered the room. She said that M. Cartier was in the salon, and desired to see Monsieur Ryvington.

Randle went into the salon forthwith.

"You bring news—you have caught those fellows?" he asked the chief detective eagerly, almost as soon as he set eyes on him.

"They have caught themselves," said the other, grimly.

"They are in custody, then!"

"More than that—they are executed."

"You are joking, M. Cartier," said Randle, a little impatiently. "It is impossible. Besides, there is no capital punishment in Switzerland."

"They have executed themselves," answered the other, quietly. "They would have done better to give themselves up to me. The worst that could have happened to them would have been fifteen years' imprisonment; and, as M. le Prince is not dead, they would doubtless have got the benefit of extenuating circumstances, and received a yet milder sentence."

"All this is a riddle to me," rejoined Red Ryvington, still more impatiently. "Will you have the goodness to be a little more explicit, M. Cartier?"

"Precisely. I am about to explain everything. It is a very strange story. But first of all I must ask if you ever heard of the *Perte du Rhone*?"

"I have read about it in the guide books. It is where the Rhone loses itself—disappears underground near Bellegarde—is it not?"

"Precisely. It would be more accurate to say partially disappears, for in summer a part of the stream descends into the gulf, a part flows over and beyond it; and, although the river reappears a little farther on, no substance that goes down the *Perte* is ever seen again. Well, on the day I was here last, directly after I had seen you, I received a communication from the police at Bellegarde, stating that on the previous

Monday a boat containing two strangers had been lost in the Perte. They informed us of the circumstance because, the men being unknown there, the Bellegarde people thought they might possibly have descended the river from Geneva, or some other part of the canton."

"But how did they know these men were strangers? You said just now that whatever went down the Perte was irrecoverably lost."

"I will tell you. The navigation of the Rhone from Geneva to Bellegarde is extremely difficult and dangerous. The river, as it issues from the lake here, is more than two hundred yards wide. Lower down, even after there has been added to it the vast volume of the Arve, it is compressed between high walls of rock to a width of forty or fifty feet. It is, moreover, the swiftest stream in Europe. From here to the French frontier, indeed, the river is almost one continuous rapid, and to descend in a boat is a feat only to be attempted by experienced boatmen. The sole way of passing Bellegarde is to follow a channel which has been cut immediately above the Perte for the service of the mills in the neighbourhood. Well, on Monday afternoon last, a boat containing two men was seen approaching Bellegarde, and to the horror of the people belonging to the mills, instead of making for the channel it went straight on towards the gulf. An effort was made to warn the men of their danger; but, not understanding or not heeding the excited shouts of the bystanders, they continued their fatal course. When they discovered their mistake they made a desperate attempt to save themselves, and cried frantically for help. It was too late; the next moment they and their boat were lost for ever. The day after, an oar, which had been swept over the Perte, was found lower down the stream.

"When I heard of this incident," continued M. Cartier, "it occurred to me that these men might be the two who were concerned in the attempt to murder M. le Prince, and I proceeded to make a searching investigation with a view to ascertain how far my conjecture had warrant. On inquiry among the boatmen here, I found that on the very morning after the attempt, a small boat was missed from the quay opposite this house. The chain by which it was fastened had been broken, as appeared, with a stone, and the owner had neither seen nor heard anything of his boat since. My next proceeding was to send to Bellegarde for the oar, and despatch one of our best agents down the Rhone valley with instructions to make careful inquiry at every village on the banks of the river if anything had been seen of the boat and the two men.

"My agent returned yesterday. Here is his *procès verbal*."

The *procès verbal*, or report, a rather lengthy document,

recounted that, shortly after sunrise on the morning following the attempt on Prince Sergius Kalougia's life, a boat was seen to pass the Moulin (Mill) sous Vernier, a romantic gorge in the Rhone valley. There were two men in it, one of whom, according to the testimony of the miller, wore a fur cap. They were seen again at La Plaine, where one of them went ashore to buy food. He also purchased a hat from a peasant, saying that he had lost his own in the river. The boat and its occupants were noticed at several other places between the French frontier and Bellegarde, and, finally, the man whose boat had been taken recognised the oar as his own, and was ready to swear to its identity.

"You think, then," said Randle, after reading the report, "that the man with the fur cap was the one who stabbed the Prince, and the other his accomplice?"

"There is not the shadow of a doubt about it. The escape was well planned too, and if they had not gone down the Perte they might have got clear away. We watched railway and road, and searched all over Geneva, but it never occurred to us that they would have the hardihood to make off by the river. Once past Bellegarde, they might easily have reached Lyons without attracting attention, for they would doubtless have disguised themselves, and the fur cap, as we know, was thrown away before they got as far as La Plaine. They were great scoundrels, and richly deserve their fate. Yet I must confess to a feeling of regret; for with them perishes our only chance of solving the mystery."

"I am afraid so."

"Their employers will not give us any clue, you may be sure of that."

"You still think they were emissaries of the Holy Brotherhood, though?"

"That is certainly my opinion, but it is only an opinion, after all. It is always conceivable, you know, that the men may have been personal enemies of M. le Prince, or even Nihilists who for some reason unknown to us, and possibly to him, want to get him out of the way. For among the Nihilists, as I happen to know (though I daresay M. Kalougia does not think so) there are black sheep—men who for a sufficient consideration are willing to play the part of traitors. But all this is conjecture. We have not succeeded in unravelling the mystery. When that is said, all is said."

After M. Cartier's departure, Randle told Sergius what had come to pass.

"It is better so, my friend," said the latter, gravely, after a few minutes' thought. "If M. Cartier be right—and I think he

is—these men have met their deserts—no emissary of the Holy Brotherhood deserves to live—and as they have disappeared they will not have to be tried. Dora and I will not have to remain in Geneva and give evidence; and I shall be spared the pain of having my name and nearly every incident of my life bruited all over Europe. Yes, it is better so.”

There was now no necessity for Red Ryvington to prolong his stay in Geneva. The investigation could be pursued no farther, and Kalongia, although he would have to keep his bed for two or three weeks longer, was quite out of danger. So the next day Randle, leaving his mother to keep Dora company, started for London.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

MARRIED IN HASTE.

THE conversation with Red Ryvington on the way to Holyhead left a decidedly unpleasant impression on the mind of Charles Augustus M'Mullen. He thought, to use his own expression, there was “something behind;” some contingency that might prevent the marriage of the other Ryvington and Lady Conacre, or otherwise mar his plans. But after long and deep cogitation he came to the conclusion that the only eventuality he had not taken into account was the death of his cousin or her swain before the day fixed for the wedding. The contingency was not a very probable one, perhaps, both the individuals in question being young and in good health. Still, there was no telling; life was confoundedly uncertain, and, on the principle of leaving as little to chance as possible, the member for Rorytown made up his mind that, so soon as he had finished his business (which included the delivery of an address to his constituents on the “Bloodthirstiness of Englishmen and the meekness of the Irish race”), he would hasten back to London, and insist on the lovers being forthwith married by special licence.

When he laid this suggestion before the parties concerned, they were naturally taken rather aback, and Lady Conacre (who wanted to have a grand wedding and a great flare-up) offered numerous objections; but her cousin adduced reasons so weighty in favour of the course he recommended that her ladyship ended by giving a grudging and somewhat sulky consent.

As for the bridegroom expectant, he fell in with M'Mullen's views at once. He had grace enough left to be a little ashamed of what he was doing; he did not want the *éclat* of a grand

wedding, and he did want to obtain possession of Deepdene at the earliest possible moment. But for this last consideration, Lady Conacre was probably about the last woman in the world that Mr. Ryvington would have cared to marry. Though a peer's widow she was a peasant's daughter, and, what was worse, a peasant's daughter spoiled. Her sudden elevation and her life at Conacre Castle had developed all that was bad in her character, at the expense of most that was good in it. Her manners were those of a pert barmaid; her taste in dress was as tawdry as that of a gipsy fortune-teller. She was frightfully passionate, and when much provoked either used very bad language or relieved her excitement by a violent bout of hysterics. If Deep Randle did not know all this, he had seen quite enough to make it manifest that his union with her ladyship was not likely to conduce much to their mutual happiness, and he had already half resolved (as soon as he decently could) to send her back to Ireland with an allowance of a thousand a year (which amount was secured to her by settlement in the event of her surviving him), and so relieve himself of her company. With the balance of his income he could make himself very comfortable, he thought, even without a wife.

Four days after M'Mullen's return to London they were married. As the shortness of the interval did not admit of elaborate preparation, the proceedings were of the simplest. The wedding guests consisted of some half-dozen friends of Lady Conacre's, and the member for Rorytown acted as Mr. Ryvington's best man.

When the knot had been duly tied the bridal party were driven to her ladyship's lodgings in Bayswater, whence, after the breakfast (M'Mullen had insisted on the breakfast), the newly-married couple proposed to set out for Paris.

In the interval between the return from church and the breakfast the two M.P.'s found themselves alone in the drawing-room.

"Now, my boy," exclaimed M'Mullen, slapping the other on the back (Mr. Ryvington hated to be slapped on the back), "you are all right now. Twelve thousand a year and a handsome wife. You are the luckiest man in London this day. I congratulate you, my boy, on your marriage with me cousin, Lady Conacre."

Randle muttered something which might have been either thanks or the reverse; and his companion, seeing that he was not in a very companionable mood, took up a morning paper which was lying on the table, and began to read. He had not read many minutes when a portentous change passed over his countenance. He became red and pale by turns, and then,

rising so quickly from his chair as to overturn it, he literally rushed at Mr. Ryvington and thrust the paper in his face.

"Look at this, you villain!" he shouted, in a voice hoarse with passion; "look at this!"

Deep Randle, thinking that the member for Rorytown had suddenly gone mad, did "look at this." It was a paragraph headed "Mysterious Occurrence at Geneva," and gave a full, true, and circumstantial account of the attempted murder of Prince Sergius Kalongia. It contained, too, several particulars concerning his antecedents, mentioned that he had been living for some time at Whitebrook, in Lancashire, and that he had married there an English lady (described as "the Princess"), sister of one of the members for Whitebrook and cousin of the other.

Mr. Ryvington read the account a second time, dwelling on every word, and then, feeling that it was all too true, he turned almost sick with rage and disappointment. His sister was the heiress, himself a ruined man, and he had just been tied for life to a wretched woman without either money, breeding, or education.

He was roused by an exclamation from M'Mullen.

"Did you know this?" he asked. "Did you know it?—did you know it?—did you know it, I say?"

"Know it? Do you suppose if I had known it I would have condescended to associate with a blackguard like you, or marry a creature like your cousin?"

"You are a liar. You did know, and I'll have you punished. I'll have you prosecuted for obtaining money and procuring my guarantee to a loan under false pretences."

This was too much for Deep Randle. Without answering a word he dashed his fist full in the Irishman's face. M'Mullen returned the blow with interest, and a fierce fight was only prevented by Lady Conacre, who ran shrieking into the room, and threw herself between the combatants.

"Oh, you blackguards! What are you after doing?" she exclaimed. "Fighting on my wedding-day! Are you not ashamed of yourself, Randle? What does it all mean, Charles Alexander?"

"It means that this man has deceived us. His sister is the wife of a prince, and takes all the property. He has not a shilling. You lose your five hundred a year, and I am liable to Corney M'Swiney for five thousand pounds. That's what it means."

"Is this true?" she asked, turning fiercely to her husband.

"It is not true that I have deceived you. I am deceived myself. Do you think if I had known my sister was entitled to the

property I should have been such a fool as to marry you?" answered Mr. Ryvington, savagely.

On this her ladyship snapped her fingers in his face, and after calling him a "murdering villain," and otherwise abusing him in language more forcible than polite, she threw herself on the floor in a perfect paroxysm of hysterics.

Deep Randle took advantage of the confusion caused by this incident to slip quietly from the room, and a few minutes later he left the house. On reaching the street he chartered a passing hansom, and ordered the driver to take him to the hotel in Jermyn Street at which he lodged. All was over now, and it was necessary for him to decide what he should do. If his sister alone had been concerned, he might have asked her to make over to him a moiety of the estate. But he judged others by himself, and being now fully persuaded that Kalougia was a penniless adventurer, who had married Dora for her fortune, and conscious that he had treated him of late with scant courtesy, he felt certain that the request, if made, would be peremptorily rejected. The best thing he could do, he thought, was to leave England at once. Not only was he over head and ears in debt, but he was threatened with the loss of his seat, and possibly with a prosecution for bribery. Tom Oliviger had written to say that, unless Mr. Ryvington could lend him £10,000, he should have to suspend payment, in which event—as his books and papers would pass into other hands—all the facts connected with the two elections were sure to become known, with the certain result of a petition against Mr. Ryvington's return. Yes, it was quite clear he could not remain in England.

As it happened, Deep Randle was in funds, the balance of the loan raised in Dublin being almost intact. When he had finally made up his mind to go away, he called for another hansom, went to the city, drew his money (some £3,500) out of the bank in which it was deposited, and took passage for Australia by the overland route. The next day he left London for Melbourne. His intention was to go up the country and buy land, but he never got any farther than Melbourne, where he fell into bad company, became a confirmed drunkard, and little more than a year after he landed in Australia died a drunkard's death.

When the circumstances in which her brother had left England came to Dora's knowledge, she paid all his debts (though not before M'Mullen had been made bankrupt on his guarantee to the Dublin money-lender); and, if Red Ryvington had not dissuaded her from doing so, she would have granted an allowance to Lady Conacre equal to that which the latter had forfeited by marrying Deep Ryvington. He advised her rather

to pay the deserted wife a sum down without conditions, and "cut the connection," and the dowager, much to her surprise, received four thousand pounds on the strict understanding that she was to make no further demands on her husband's sister.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

ERE WE PART.

ONCE more in the Furca Pass.

It is the beginning of October. Mountain hotels are closed, Alpine routes deserted, and most of the tourists, who a little while ago were crowding the railways, the steamboats, and the highways of Switzerland, are either hieing them towards the south or returning to their northern homes and native fogs. But though the summer is past the weather is gloriously fine. The air is clearer, the sky bluer, the outlines of the mountains are more clearly defined, and the views grander than in the height of the season.

A travelling carriage, in which are seated a lady and gentleman, is descending the Furca road. At a sign from the gentleman the carriage stops.

"See, Muriel," says the gentleman who, as the reader has already guessed, is Red Ryvington, "that is the place where I lay asleep when I heard the diligence bells."

"When you were called to save me, dearest."

"Yes, darling, when I was called to save you and receive the greatest blessing of my life—your love."

"I am doubly your debtor, Randle dear, for you both saved my life and gave me your heart."

"And in saving your life did I not save what is more precious to me than my own?" said Randle, fondly taking her hand in his. "Am I not repaid a thousand-fold?"

"You did right to say you were called. If it had not been for that sleep in the wood and those diligence bells—" (here she paused and shuddered.) "Our fate depended on those bells."

"Yes, and the fate of others—of Kalougia and Dora, and of how many more I know not. I retain enough of my mother's creed to believe there is an appointed course for all of us—that a divinity doth shape our ends, rough hew them how we will."

They stopped again at the point where the carriage had been carried down the precipice, and recalled the strange events of the day on which they first met, and Muriel paid the tribute of a tear to the memory of poor Miss Joyce. Then they strolled, hand in

hand, down the road along which they had once walked when neither knew the other's name.

"We stay to-night at Viesch, I suppose?" asked Muriel.

"Yes, and to-morrow night at Brigue. We are going over the old ground, you know."

"And we meet Dora and Kalougia at Nyon?"

"That is the arrangement. I must send them a post-card to-night to say when they may expect us."

"Kalougia is very much better, Dora said in her last letter."

"Yes; he is quite strong again. The waters of Divonne have restored him to more than pristine vigour."

"It will be pleasant going home with them."

"Very. And I shall be glad to get home, for I have much to do."

"And I am longing to see Redscar and begin my new duties, dearest. Were the letters you received this morning on business satisfactory?"

"Quite so. Since we have taken Auf der Mauer into partnership, I can leave home without fear of unpleasant surprises."

The programme sketched by Randle was duly carried out. Sergius and Dora met him and Lady Muriel at Nyon (where they all made a call on Mademoiselle Vientemps), and after spending a day or two at Divonne they returned together to England. Randle received a hint from his brother that there was some intention on the part of certain enthusiastic White-brookers of meeting them at the station, unharnessing their carriage, and drawing them home. The execution of this kindly-meant design, which approved itself neither to Red Ryvington nor his bride, was, however, prevented by the arrival of the party a day sooner than they were expected. But Randle could not prevent a deputation of factory girls waiting on Muriel and presenting her with a charming miniature of her husband (copied from a portrait in the possession of Mrs. Ryvington) and an epithalamium specially written for the occasion by Bill Bentley.

Muriel was delighted. She acknowledged the compliment in a pretty little speech, shook hands with every member of the deputation, and invited them to take tea with her. Randle capped the invitation by asking all the Redscar lasses and their men-folk to an entertainment best described by the French term *soirée littéraire et musicale*, in the new loom shed which had just been roofed in. Among the performers on the occasion were Muriel and Dora, who sang some of their best songs and played several choice pieces on the piano. Randle and Kalougia could neither sing nor play, but they made some chemical and electrical experiments which greatly pleased all who witnessed them.

Lady Muriel won golden opinions from the work-people.

"Th' mayster's new wife," they said, "was a gradley nice lass," which was the highest praise they could give her.

Nobody was better pleased with the arrival of the newly-wedded pair and the turn things had taken generally than our old friend Twister. He went to the "Rainbow" and ordered champagnes round (first stipulating with the landlord that, as he was "going in for a lot," it should be "put in" at a low price). He drank a lot himself, albeit no more than he could carry comfortably home. But, as he subsequently confided to his friend Striver, he was "that dry" the day after that he kept a little lad "running all day from morning to night fetchin' him bitter beer."

The year in which these events took place was marked in the annals of Whitebrook with a white stone, and the general feeling of the town was happily and exactly expressed by Twister in the speech he made at the "Rainbow," when proposing the health of the bride and bridegroom.

"A Whitebrook lad," he said, "has gotten wed to a Herl's daughter; a Whitebrook lass has gotten wed to a Prince; and a Whitebrook dog has won th' Trafalgar Cup. If that isn't coming it strong I should just like to know what is."

THE END.

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